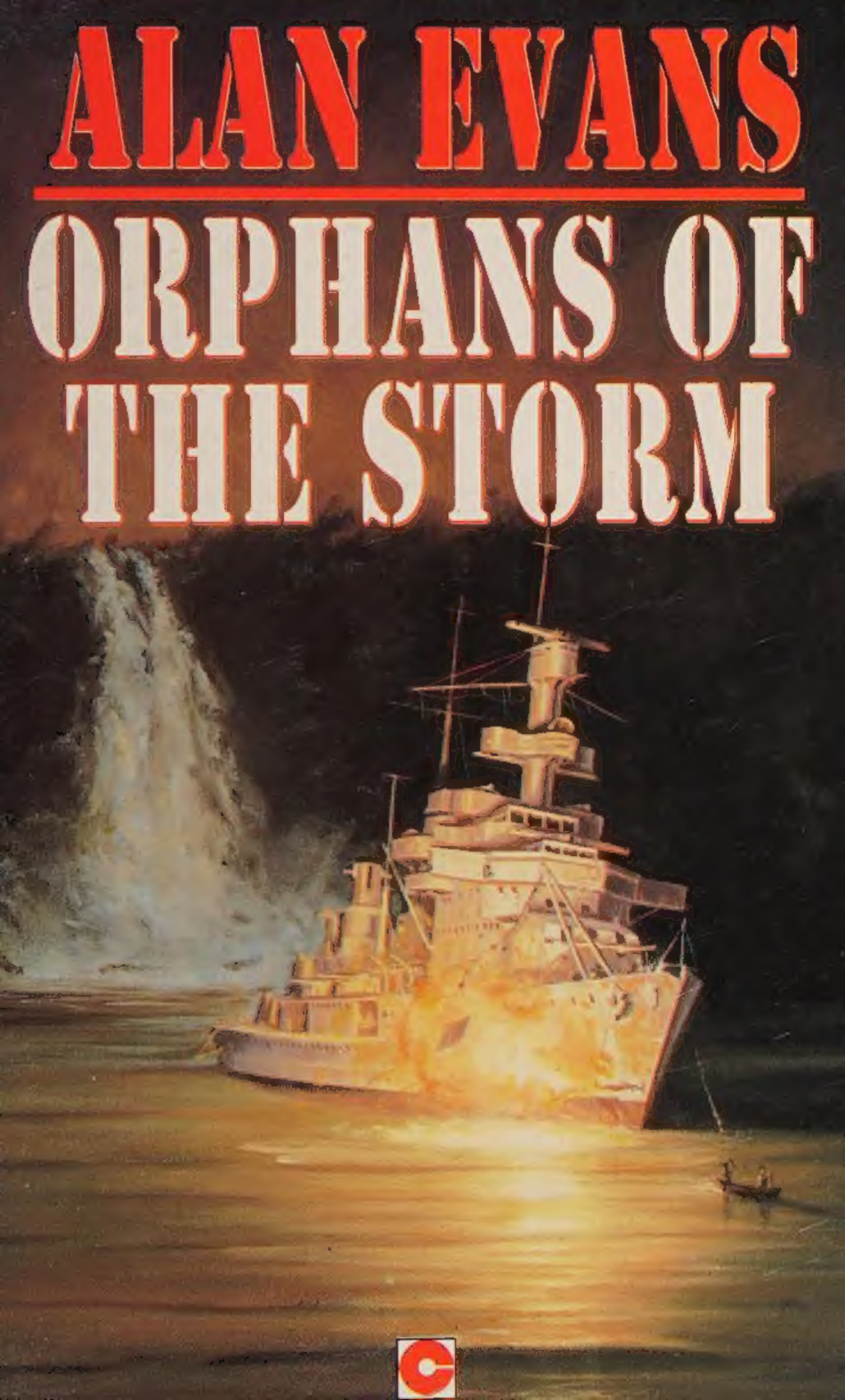
ALAN EVANS

ORPHANS OF THE STORM



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ORPHANS OF THE STORM

Kurt and Fritsch were side by side as they approached the foot of the slope. Smith appeared suddenly before them, lit by the beams of the headlights washing down from the road above and behind them. The muzzle-flash of his Colt blinded them and the report was deafening. Fritsch cried out as something slammed into his side. He fell, tangling with Kurt's legs and bringing him down in a sprawling heap.

Kurt Larsen swore at Fritsch again and struggled out from under his groaning weight. He lifted to his knees to peer over the body of the SS officer and saw the man climbing in over the bow of the boat that nudged the shore as the sea thrust it. The man turned and his hand reached out to point the Colt at Larsen.

Kurt ducked as the pistol flamed again, the reports crashed and something snarled over his head. Then the firing ceased and after some seconds he cautiously raised his head. The launch had backed away from the beach and turned, now slid away to be lost in the rain-filled darkness.

But he remembered the face. He had only glimpsed it in the light from the headlamps still burning up on the road and through a curtain of rain and shadows, but eyes and pistol had the same cold, deadly look. He would never forget that face.

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About the Author

Alan Evans is the well-established author of many exciting wartime thrillers including, most recently, NIGHT ACTION and THE EAGLE AT TARANTO. He has also written three children's books. Born in Sunderland, he was a member of the Royal Artillery (Volunteers) for many years, and has served both at home and abroad. He was a gunner for two years, and then went on to be a survey sergeant in various R.A. units. Married with two sons, the author lives at Walton-on-Thames in Surrey.

Orphans of the Storm

Alan Evans

CORONET BOOKS
Hodder and Stoughton

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First published in Great Britain in 1990 by Hodder and Stoughton Ltd

Coronet edition 1990

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British Library C.I.P.

Evans, Alan
Orphans of the storm.
I. Title
823'.914[F]

ISBN 0-340-54414-7

Printed and bound in Great Britain for Hodder and Stoughton Paperbacks, a division of Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., Mill Road, Dunton Green, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 2YA (Editorial Office: 47 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP) by Clays Ltd., St Ives plc.

Acknowledgments

I have inserted some fictional characters into the crew of *Ajax* and the words attributed to Mike Fowler are my paraphrasing.

The episode in Chapter 6 is based on an exploit of Clare Hollingworth OBE, who was a Foreign Correspondent at that time and crossed the border from Poland into Germany.

My thanks go to Eric Smith of HMS *Ajax*, whose recorded recollections I consulted, among others, in the Sound Records Department of the Imperial War Museum.

I would also like to thank the staffs of the National Maritime Museum and Walton Library.

But, as always, any mistakes are mine!

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1

The Man and the Woman

On that night in March 1939 Sarah stood naked and held her breath in her room in the house in Berlin, the nightgown trailing from one hand She watched the turning of the door handle as it was twisted by the man outside. Robert Hurst fought for his life in the darkness of a Valparaiso alley. The usually elegant and poised, but now bedraggled Hannah Fitzsimmons was dragged from her cell in a Spanish prison, on her way to a firing-squad. Jake Tyler prayed, two thousand feet above Massachusetts, as the torn and crippled biplane shook under his hands, one wing sagging. Véronique Duclos, in the firelit dusk outside of Paris, held the wailing child in her arms, lit by the flames that closed around them.

Captain David Cochrane Smith stood at the back of the crowded bridge of the destroyer *Saracen*. Anxiety made him restless but there was no room to pace so he shifted from one foot to another. The night was dark, the sea oily under low clouds that shed rain to whip across the open bridge *Saracen*'s captain, Lieutenant-Commander Julian Gates, perched in his tall chair right forward by the screen, was swathed in oilskins like the rest of the bridge staff. Smith was the odd man out in the shabby, stained trenchcoat and the slouch hat pulled down over his eyes. One side of the coat hung heavily under the weight of the Colt automatic pistol in its pocket. In the darkness he was featureless but the light of day would show pale blue eyes in a thin, brown face, fair hair shading into grey at the temples.

The Spanish coast lay some ten miles to port. Spain was in the last throes of a bloody civil war but the fighting was now far to the north. That yellow glow against the sky came from the distant lights of Malaga. *Saracen* showed no lights and

there were none astern of her but – Gates growled the question, "Where is *Brandenburg* now?"

A look-out answered from the starboard wing of the bridge, "Still astern of us, sir, by a mile, maybe two "

Brandenburg was a German cruiser and this was Smith's first sighting of her She usually sailed in company with the *Graf Spee*, which the Germans called a *Panzerschiff* and was sometimes known to the rest of the world as a pocket battleship. That was a deceptively innocuous term, suggesting that *Graf Spee* was something of a toy warship, a fake She was not. It meant that she was a small battleship. Bigger than any cruiser, fast and heavily armed, she could be a killer, a wolf of the seas. Now she was flagship of the force ostensibly stationed in these waters to protect the rights of German shipping – but in fact to assist Franco, the Spanish Fascist general who was winning the civil war, when that was possible. *Saracen* had sighted *Brandenburg* on a converging course at dusk. She had followed them ever since.

Gates turned his head to peer at Smith across the darkened bridge, "Might be a coincidence, sir, but it looks as though she's trailing us. Bloody nuisance, anyway."

Smith said softly, "We don't want an audience "

Gates nodded, "Think I'll test her by altering course out to sea. Can always circle back." He faced forward and ordered, "Starboard twenty."

Smith leaned, balancing as *Saracen* heeled in the turn, then he straightened as she came back onto an even keel and headed away from the coast. He was a lone figure in the crowd. They were all a part of this ship and he was not. He had not commanded a King's ship since 1918 when he had ostensibly retired from the Navy He envied Gates, who with his crew was preparing for a war, because Gates had command.

Smith had done his duty secretly, working in Intelligence, and paid for it in obscurity. He looked back on it with pride but there were also regrets. There was the wife who had left him, now only a memory, and the child she had taken with her, that he had scarcely seen. They were lost to him. But a ship? Surely if - when – war came then Admiralty would acknowledge his services, grant his request and give him

a ship?

Gates broke in on his thoughts: "We've slipped her. I'll give her a few minutes to get out of our way and then take you in, sir."

Smith nodded, "Thank you."

The staff on the bridge wondered at that 'sir' and the deference Gates showed towards the shabby civilian. But Gates remembered Smith and his record in the war of 1914–18. That had been spectacular. But soon after the war ended Smith had left the Navy and dropped out of sight. There were those who had said Smith would never have gained Flag Rank, anyway, was even unfit to command. That he was insubordinate, took matters into his own hands and only survived through luck. Gates thought Smith would need all his luck tonight.

On *Brandenburg*'s bridge *Oberleutnant zur See* Kurt Larsen used his handkerchief to clean rain from the lenses of his binoculars then set them to his eyes again. He was just short of six feet tall, heavy-shouldered but narrow in the waist, around which was belted a holstered Luger Parabellum pistol. He swept the night horizon slowly, steadily, with the powerful glasses. Then he lowered them to report, "We've lost her, *Herr Kapitan*. She's turned out to sea."

Gustav Moehle grunted acknowledgment and spoke around the cold cigar gripped between his teeth, "Good. Go down and join your men. Herr Fritsch?"

"I am ready." Fritsch was not navy but *Gestapo*. He was thin, his face seeming drawn to a point at the end of his long nose. He wore the grey-green field uniform of the SS and he also had a Luger on his belt. He exuded confidence as he followed Larsen from the bridge.

Aboard *Suracen* the look-out reported, "Ship bearing red three oh, sir! Two miles. I can just see her against the lights." Those were the lights of Malaga to the south. "I think she's *Brandenburg* again, sir."

Gates clapped his own binoculars to his eyes, swore softly then lowered them again. "That's her." He spoke over his shoulder, "She's lying off where we were to put you ashore,

sir. We can't land you right under her nose."

Smith answered crisply, "Then I'll go in further north. Now."

Gates swivelled in his chair. "But I thought you were to be met – "

"I will be." Paco had been given a fall-back rendezvous in case Spanish soldiers or naval patrols made the first unusable. If Smith did not land at that first on time then Paco would go to the fall-back.

Saracen altered course again, sliding through the black night a mile to seaward of *Brandenburg*. They lost sight of the German cruiser when she was no longer silhouetted against the lights of Malaga When *Saracen*'s engines stopped, she slowed then rolled in the swell. She was south of *Brandenburg*, between her and Malaga but well to seaward, so not set up against the glow from the lights of the city.

A launch carried Smith in, cruising only slowly with its engine throttled back to a rumble inaudible more than a few hundred yards away, and showing little bow wave or wake. They passed within a mile of *Brandenburg* but her look-outs could not see the launch bucking through the swell and hidden under the sluicing rain. It ran off Smith's trenchcoat and dripped from the brim of his hat.

His thoughts turned to the room in the fortress of Gibraltar. He had sat there only three nights ago and the senior of the two neatly-suited men who had flown from London had told him, "An American woman – Hannah Fitzsimmons, a war correspondent – has been arrested by Franco's men on a charge of espionage. We think she had smelt a rat and was making a run for Gibraltar, but they picked her up at Malaga and are holding her there. We want you to get her out but there isn't much time. They will move her north very soon and then she will be out of reach. She'll be tried and shot."

Smith nodded acceptance of that; executions were commonplace in this war. He had asked, "An American woman? Why us?"

A shrug: "We're helping them out. A favour, for future favours. Hands across the sea and all that. We thought you

might have the means, the organisation and the men."

Smith had, for spiriting British nationals out of Spain and observing the activities of the Germans and Italians fighting for Franco. He said, "They're not exactly an army."

"How many can you muster?"

"I have one with me." That was Paco, who was invaluable. He was fluent in English while Smith knew only a few words in Spanish. He said, "I can lay my hands on another three for this job." They were a long way north but he could fetch them back.

The two exchanged glances. The younger chewed his lip and the senior frowned his disappointment. He started, "It would seem impossible – "

But Smith was already thinking ahead and broke in on him: "All right. We'll do it."

Within the hour he had sent a coded telegram to Cartagena and was aboard a fishing-boat out of Gibraltar with Paco. They transferred to a Spanish boat off Malaga, ostensibly as smugglers, who were aided and abetted by fishermen. When Smith returned to Gibraltar two days later, it was to report: "They're moving her tonight." That was all he knew. He had no details of the route or the exact time, but even that scrap of information had cost him a thumping bribe.

He wondered now, blinking against the rain as the launch drove in towards the dark shore, if that bribe would prove to be money wasted. He was gambling that the woman would not be moved until late in the evening. And that the soldiers would take her by the coast road to Motril before turning inland to Granada – and the north? Maybe only as far as Granada. They'd had executions there, shooting them behind the Alhambra and outside the city. Was he too late? In the wrong place? In either case Hannah Fitzsimmons would die. He would soon know.

And he only had this slim chance of saving her because her captors had planned her move in advance. Why?

The launch ran into the surf and grounded. He stepped forward into the bow and dropped over into the sea that soaked him to the knees then to his waist as a wave lifted the launch, shoved it into him and he staggered. The young

seaman standing in the surf and holding the bow, grabbed at Smith's arm, steadying. He asked, "Isn't somebody waiting for you, sir?" The shore was dark, deserted.

Smith answered, "Almost always." Diego Garcia had waded ashore on a night like this but the *Guardias* had been waiting for him They fired at point blank range and he was hit a dozen times yet he lived in agony for another hour before he died on the beach.

Smith laughed and waded towards the shore The seaman gaped after him then muttered, "Mad bastard." He shoved the launch clear and hauled himself in over the bow.

Shingle crunched under Smith's boots then he was moving in near silence as he crossed soft sand. He looked back once and saw the launch had turned, was now only a blur in the darkness and soon would be lost He faced forward. There ahead of him lay the shadow of undergrowth and the lift of the shore towards the road. A voice called from the darkness, "*Señor!*"

Smith recognised it and answered, "Paco!"

The gipsy stepped out of the shadows His dark face was almost hidden by the wide brim of his hat and a blanket was pinned around his shoulders against the rain. He said shortly, "We had to come here. There are other men on the road " He jerked his head, indicating the north. "You saw them?"

Smith nodded and asked, "Where are the others?"

Another jerk of the head. "Emilio and Felipe wait on the road. Manolo has not yet come from Malaga; it is early yet."

"Not too early." Smith shoved through the scrub and leaned into the slope as he climbed up to the road, Paco at his shoulder.

In Malaga the motor cycle stood on the corner of a side-street in the shadow of the cathedral. It was an Italian machine, a Moto Guzzi, almost new but deliberately battered and grimed to give it the anonymity of hard usage. Manolo, careless of the rain, small and bandy-legged as a jockey, stood astride it.

When the big car turned into the broad avenue running past the end of his side-street he straightened, watched it

approach then pass in a spurt of spray. He knew the car and in the light from the street-lamps he glimpsed the passenger in the rear seat, wedged between the two *Guardias*.

He pulled his goggles down over his eyes, kicked the Moto Guzzi into life, eased it out into the avenue and then accelerated. Within a few seconds he was sliding past the car, confirming the identity of the passenger with a quick, sideways glance, then roaring ahead, out onto the coast road. There the darkness was total, his headlight dipped so it only lit the rain-splashed road for twenty yards ahead, but he had driven the road a dozen times to learn every turn, rut and pothole, and kept up his speed.

Fritsch stood to one side, hands on hips, as the men in Kurt Larsen's party wrestled the road-block into position It was no more than a short spar some fifteen feet long resting in trestles set on either side of the road. They had brought it ashore with them in the boat from *Brandenburg*.

The road here was a grey ribbon in the night, straight and low-lying with only a gentle climb up from the shore. But it rose to the left and the south where a wooded cape poked out from the hillside. The road curled into the trees there and under the overhanging cliff then was lost to sight. Kurt was uneasy, lacking Fritsch's confidence. He ordered his dozen men to spread along the edge of the road on either side of the block.

Fritsch put in, "Be ready to put a light on that barrier when we hear the car."

Kurt answered shortly, "I've given the order. The man is ready."

Fritsch glanced at his watch "Any minute now."

"How do you know?"

"That is not your concern " Fritsch had been given the time of the car's departure almost two days ago His source of information was higher than that purchased by Smith When he saw Kurt Larsen take his Luger pistol from its holster and check the load, Fritsch said, "You won't need that."

"The guards may resist – "

Fritsch broke in, "It will be sufficient for your men to

show their arms." He was smiling. You're too bloody clever by half, Kurt thought. He put away the pistol but left the holster handily unclipped. Then he lifted his head to peer southward down the road, to the wooded cape. The car would come from there.

Smith thought the German sailors on the road stared straight at him. He crouched among the trees on the cape, Paco at his side, and looked down on the men from *Brandenburg* preparing their ambush. It was a good place; Smith had planned to lay his own trap there. Paco said, "They are on the same business."

Smith nodded agreement then worked back into the trees, rose to his feet and hurried back across the cape. Questions plagued him: Was it possible the party from *Brandenburg* was after the same prisoner? Why? Or were they laying for another prize? He thrust them aside because they had nothing to do with his task. That was clear enough.

The road on this side of the cape ran higher above the sea than the Germans' stretch and was cut into the hillside. Emilio crouched among bushes on its seaward edge, immobile as a rock, on guard Opposite him Felipe was at work on the hillside, carrying out the orders Smith had given earlier: "One charge there, another there Fire both when the car is past the first." Those were the only instructions Felipe needed. Before civil war tore Spain apart he had been a shot-firer in a mine. He had taught something of his craft to Smith. Now Felipe had set the first charge and was working on the second The rain had become a deluge, sluicing off the hill and drumming on the scrub, bouncing as vapour from the road.

Smith lifted his voice above the din to ask, "Paco! Where are the horses? You have one for Manolo?"

"One for him and a spare one in case any goes lame. They are back down the road towards Malaga, a minute's easy walking."

Smith said, "I'll take the woman. You and the others go for the horses – noisily."

Paco nodded. "We'll draw the Germans off."

Smith dug inside his sodden trenchcoat, pulled out a flat

package and put it into Paco's hands. "There is the money. Get away across country and leave the horses before you reach Granada. I will contact you again in the north but it may be some time."

"All that is understood." Paco tucked the package away under his blanket then reached out to grip Smith's arms: "Go with God!"

It was then that they heard the motor cycle. The mutter came from the south, the direction of Malaga. It rose to a snarl but was still muted by the roar of the storm. Then the machine slithered around the last slimy bend and ran down on them. The front wheel cast spray on either side like a bow wave and the rear kicked back a plume of mud.

Paco stood out on the verge of the road with his arm outstretched and the filthy, battered Moto Guzzi skidded to a halt with the back wheel snaking on the slime. Manolo put down his booted feet and the engine died, the dipped headlight faded out. In the silence he called to Smith, "They're about two minutes behind me." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "No more than that."

But Paco's head turned in the opposite direction, towards the wooded cape beyond which lay the men from *Brandenburg*. Smith interpreted that glance and said, "They won't have seen the light there, nor heard the machine over the noise of the storm." The rain hissed and hammered still harder on the road.

Paco grunted agreement and said, "Good. Get rid of that."

Manolo climbed off the Moto Guzzi then shoved it to the edge of the road and over to crash down through the scrub. He pushed his goggles up onto the brim of his cap and said with regret, "A pity. That is a good machine."

Emilio ran across the road and called a question at Felipe, setting the charges on the hillside, returned and reported. "Felipe is ready."

Smith looked up and just made out the one-time shot-firer squatting some twenty feet above him on the other side of the road, saw the lift of his hand. Smith worked the torch out of the pocket of his wet coat, flashed a signal out to sea and saw an answering flicker. Emilio and Manolo both patted his

shoulder as he joined them and Paco in the cover of the scrub by the road. Like a blessing, he thought, wishing me luck. And he reached out a hand to them, but stayed apart. These men were devoted to him but he did not know why.

They saw the lights of the car coming up from Malaga before they heard it. Under the beat of the rain it slid in silence around the bend then the beams of the lights steadied, splitting the darkness on the road, spilling on the wooded cape.

The two explosions came only a heartbeat apart, one vivid flash and *thump!* following the other. The hillside overhanging the wooded cape broke away and slid down onto the road in a cloud of dust that hid the car. And the hillside behind the car was also moving, a torrent of mud and rock under an umbrella of dirt spilling across the road. The car was trapped between the two.

Smith and the others were all up and running. He could see Paco a yard ahead of him, Manolo and Emilio on either side, Felipe plunging down from the hillside to the road. The car had swerved sideways at the last Smith could not see it, hidden in the dust-cloud, but that was obvious because the headlights shone across the road towards the sea like the beam of a lighthouse.

They ran into the cloud and there was the car, sideways and banged up against the wall of rubble blasted from the hillside Manolo yanked open the front door, Paco that at the rear Smith saw an interior light was burning now and thought that the driver of the car had probably switched it on; he was moving.

Emilio shot the driver.

Smith cursed Emilio but blamed himself He knew the man was a casual killer and should have what? Told him to hold his fire? When his own life might hang on shooting first? He heard Paco cursing Emilio now, because Paco knew this naval captain hated killing and respected his wishes, though not understanding them

But the shot had frozen the tableau inside the car. There was another *Guardia* in the front, next to the driver who was sliding out of his seat into the road. That one shrank down in his seat, wide eyed and still The two *Guardias* in the back

had been thrown across the car by the impact and also lay still, but the whites of their eyes showed in the dim light. Smith reached in and dragged out the nearer and there, shoved down on the floor and sandwiched between the two *Guardias*, was the woman.

He grabbed her under her arms, pulled her out of the car and propped her against it with his hands on her shoulders to hold her steady. He demanded, "Do you hear me, Miss Fitzsimmons? Do you understand me?"

The woman pushed at the hair hanging about her face. Her mouth was open and gasping for breath, her eyes staring at him, this thin-faced, slight man whose strength startled her. "I can – sure – I – what the hell . . ." She coughed on dust.

Smith said, "I'm getting you out of this." He wrapped his arm around her waist and ran her across to the scrub. He saw the others break away from the car and run away down the road. Then he was into the scrub and half-shoving, half-carrying the woman down to the shore.

Kurt Larsen and his party saw the lights of the car then heard the twin trip-hammer explosions and saw the lights swing madly across the road before they steadied, pointing out to sea. Dust lifted in a huge cloud above the trees clothing the cape. Kurt shouted, "Follow me!" And he ran for the bend in the road.

They rounded the curve in a loose group, pounding boots kicking up spray from the torrent that sluiced across the road. Kurt and Fritsch were in the lead as they stumbled over the first heap of rubble and came on the car. Kurt's men shouted as they saw the running figures disappearing into the darkness further down the road, and Fritsch bawled, "After them!"

Kurt swore at him but let the men charge off in pursuit. He snatched at Fritsch's sleeve and slowed to a walk to peer in at the men inside the car. Fritsch bawled, "Someone else has taken the prisoner!"

Kurt had suspected as much when the blasts brought down the hillside. Only now did he boggle at the coincidence, when it was proved fact. He was trying to marshal his

meagre Spanish to pose a question but it was answered before he asked it. One of the *Guardias* in the back of the car pointed and Kurt ran across the road, hauling Fritsch along with him and down the scrub-clad slope towards the shore.

Hannah Fitzsimmons limped along in the ruins of her silk stockings, one shoe left in the car and the other on the road. Her long legs were shaky under her but the man at her side carried her along until she saw the pale stretch of the beach ahead. Then he halted, put a hand on her back, shoved her forward and told her, "Run to the boat." Now she saw the launch riding into the white line of the surf and she trotted towards it, wavering and stumbling.

Smith watched her start and then turned back to the slope, drew the Colt .45 and thumbed off the safety. He lifted it two-handed.

Kurt and Fritsch were side by side as they approached the foot of the slope. Smith appeared suddenly before them, lit by the beams of the headlights washing down from the road above and behind them. The muzzle-flash of the Colt blinded them and the report was deafening. Fritsch cried out as something slammed into his side. He fell, tangling with Kurt's legs and bringing him down in a sprawling heap.

Kurt Larsen swore at Fritsch again and struggled out from under his groaning weight. He lifted to his knees to peer over the body of the SS officer and saw the man climbing in over the bow of the boat that nudged the shore as the sea thrust it. The man turned and his hand reached out to point the Colt at Larsen.

Kurt ducked as the pistol flamed again, the reports crashed and something snarled over his head. Then the firing ceased and after some seconds he cautiously raised his head. The launch had backed away from the beach and turned, now slid away to be lost in the rain-filled darkness.

But he remembered the face. He had only glimpsed it in the light from the headlamps still burning up on the road and through a curtain of rain and shadows, but eyes and pistol had the same cold, deadly look. He would never forget that face.

He looked to Fritsch and found his wound was no more

than a bruise where the bullet had struck his holstered pistol. The rest of the party came crashing down through the scrub from the road and the petty officer in the lead reported to Larsen, "They had horses waiting for them. They just rode away from us." Fritsch started on a string of obscenities.

Kurt turned his back on him and ordered, "We'll return to the ship."

Hannah Fitzsimmons sat in the tiny, cramped cabin of the launch, huddled in the blanket a sailor had snugged down around her. The door of the cabin was hooked open and she could see the man who had brought her off sitting in the sternsheets of the launch. Darkness and the shadowing brim of his hat hid most of his face but not the glitter of his eyes and the closed trap of his mouth.

He had come out of nowhere and had run her down to the shore with his arm around her and his hand on her breast. She thought she could feel it still.

She was still shaking in shock and trying to think.

She was alive.

He was a lonely figure. Was there a wife? A child?

2

The Orphans

Sarah stood at the side of the bed. She was blonde and blue-eyed, a slight, slender girl but the cotton nightdress she held before her could not hide her body. She knew that body was the cause of the trouble. She put her fists to her mouth as the door handle turned and then she heard the hoarse whisper: "*Sarah!*" That broke the spell and she walked slowly, reluctantly to the door and stood with her ear to a panel.

The whisper came again: "*Sarah!*"

The girl recognised the voice now and could hear his breathing on the other side of the door. Werner, her stepfather's cousin, was fifty years old and gross, the black tunic of his uniform padded at the chest so that his belly was less pronounced. It still bulged over and above his belt. He was a frequent guest in the house when he visited Berlin in the course of his duties, not welcomed but politely tolerated by Sarah's stepfather and mother, because he was family. He had been a Nazi Party member for fifteen years and was now senior in the SS, the *Geheime staatspolizei*, that was usually shortened to *Gestapo*.

Sarah answered him, "Go away!" And immediately cursed herself for doing so. She should have held her tongue and let him whisper himself into silence.

Now he threatened, "I'm coming in!"

Sarah shivered, cold in her nakedness. Werner would be staring at the door, looking through it as he looked through her clothes at her young body whenever they met, whenever she could not avoid it. He would be doing that now, mentally fondling her . . .

The voice was less of a whisper now, more a thick, low guttural: "A young girl like you, I could teach you a few things."

Sarah hissed, "Go to hell!" But then she heard the grate of a key in the lock. Her hand scrabbled on the chest of drawers close by and found her key. Werner had another, must have stolen hers at some time and made a copy.

She pulled on the nightdress and took a pace back from the door as it opened. Werner showed, gross, in the gap, reaching out a hand to her. She kicked out, her foot swinging up between his legs and Werner yelped, fell back. Sarah snatched his key from the outside of the door, slammed it shut and locked it again. She heard groaning and mumbled threats from the passage but ran back to her bed, climbed in and pulled the covers over her head. Hatred and anger possessed her, but there was also fear.

Jake Tyler stood six feet five, fit and strong with thick black hair and brows over dark eyes. He'd had enough of college and did not look forward with enthusiasm to the hardware business. When the twin-engined Dakota burst out of cloud and ripped the starboard wingtip off the Stearman trainer he was flying Jake held it together, in the air and right way up, by prayer and know-how, he had been flying solo for a year now. He set the biplane down in a field and after he'd stopped shaking he got the farmer to put the Stearman in a barn until it could be collected.

The farmer also let him phone the airfield where he had hired the Stearman and then gave him a lift to the railroad station. In the train on the way to Boston Jake reflected that he had almost died back there. Tomorrow he might. Or he could live to be a hundred. The one certain thing was that he would only live once. His experience of a couple of hours ago had concentrated his mind. He did not want to spend that life in the hardware business as his parents expected. He did not know what he wanted to do with it.

He decided he needed time to think. He was easy-going and did not look forward to the arguments when he said he wanted to drop out of college and opt out of the hardware business. So when he got home to Boston and found the house empty he packed a bag, wrote a letter to his bank and another of explanation to his parents but left no forwarding address. That night he was on a British tramp steamer bound

for Montevideo.

Véronique Duclos was tall for a girl, with dark hair and eyes. Now grimy and smoke-blackened, she had blood on her hands and her clothes. Those clothes, like the big spectacles she wore, were chosen as 'sensible' for economy and to create the impression that here was a young woman of a serious turn of mind. She sat on the top of the embankment south of Paris looking down at the twisted wreckage of the two trains. The express in which she had been a passenger had run into the back of the freight train and both telescoped and spilled off the rails.

Veronique had worked with other survivors to fetch out the dead and aid the injured. She was good at that and took charge as she worked. The men toiling around her recognised her ability and deferred to her. Until one came to stand at her side where she knelt to tie a makeshift dressing round an old woman's leg.

He said, "There's a girl – " He stopped there.

Véronique looked up at him and asked, "Yes? Which girl? What about her?"

He was old enough to be her father but he had come to her for orders. He had soot on his face and smelt of the fire. He said, "She is giving birth and she's trapped. In there." He pointed further along the track to the heaped and tip-tilted wagons of the freight train. One of them, a gasoline tanker, had ruptured, spilled and caught fire. The flames were eating their way down the rest of the two tangled trains. The man's dirty finger with its torn and bleeding nail indicated a place close to the advancing flames as he said again, "In there."

Veronique tied a knot and stood up. "I'll come." She followed him to the tunnel he and others had dug into the debris with their bare hands to reach the girl. It was too low to crawl and she had to lay flat and work her way in using her elbows. She found the girl in the gloom, weeping in shock, and in labour, with one arm caught immovably under a steel frame. The only favourable circumstance was that the diggers had excavated a small cave in their unsuccessful attempts to free the girl, so Veronique was able at least to

kneel and crawl about and gave thanks for that.

She was dimly aware of outside events as she worked, comforted and waited: that help was arriving in the way of fire-engines and ambulances and there was a constant buzz of voices as more men now swarmed about the scene of the disaster; that the flames were still closing on her in her cave with the girl; that it was now dusk and she was able to see to work because of the red dancing light of the fire. The men outside shouted to her to come out before it was too late but she refused. She felt the heat of the fire as she delivered the child.

Now the doctor came over to her where she sat on the embankment. The ambulance with the girl and her baby was on its way to hospital. The fire was out and now the men worked on the wreckage in the light of arc lamps. They lit the crane that had lifted the steel frame off the girl.

The doctor was elderly and bearded. He wore an old-fashioned frock coat and made a little bow to Véronique as he said, "You helped the girl with her delivery. Excellent work. You are a midwife?"

Véronique used her thumb to push the big spectacles up on her nose. "No. I am a medical student. I hope to graduate this summer."

"A doctor?" The old man was not so sure of her now. Véronique had seen that change of look before, from acceptance to uneasiness, when she was trying to get into medical school and later when she was a student. He went on, "And after you graduate?"

"I have not decided yet, M'sieur. One thing at a time. After the summer I will spend Christmas with my parents. I have not seen them for three years. My father is in the diplomatic service."

The doctor guessed vaguely, "In Indo-China, perhaps?"

Veronique shook her head, "Montevideo."

Able Seaman Robert Hurst was twenty one years old, not tall but compact and wiry. His ship was the cruiser *Ajax* but this night he was ashore in Valparaiso. He was alone but he was used to that. He was happy, relaxed, his cap pushed to the back of his head so the neatly parted, straw-coloured

hair showed. He whistled softly.

He walked along one busy street and saw an alley on his right that led to another. The alley was a dark tunnel with a glimpse of light and traffic at the far end. He took the alley as a short cut. He was halfway along its fifty-yard length when he heard the soft footfalls closing behind him.

He turned quickly just in time to see the white flicker of the knife and to lean away from that first thrust. He saw now that there were three knives, three men, boxing him in, closing in. He backed away, desperately seeking a weapon, found a heap of rubbish behind him and saw the knife lick out at him again. He jumped back over the rubbish, slipped and fell, grabbed a handful of dirt and threw it at the man now following him over the pile. That gained him a second and in that time he found his weapon.

It was a length of wood like a fence-post, three to four feet long and as thick as his wrist. He held it as he bounced to his feet but the men were almost too close now. He swatted one knife aside but a second laid open his left forearm. He heard his attackers snarl as the blood spurted and he growled deep in his chest. The bastards were ready to kill him for the few pounds in his pocket.

He gripped the post two handed as if it were a rifle with bayonet fixed, blocked another thrust then lunged. The end of the timber slammed into the face of the nearest man and he fell back lifting his hands to the hurt. Hurst parried thrusts from the other two then stepped forward and 'gave the butt' to one of them, whipping the heel of the post up into the man's groin. He fell away, clutching himself.

The third hesitated now, suddenly left alone. Hurst seized on that hesitation, lunged again and this time found the belt-line. The last man doubled over the post then wheeled away and ran. Hurst glanced around him quickly and saw no further threat. The other two were also running back along the alley.

Hurst staggered off in the other direction. He had to do something about the wound in his arm that dripped blood but that would wait until he was out in the light. He still carried the chunk of wood.

When he emerged from the alley into the main street with

its crowded pavements a voice said, "Now then, what have we got here? Where's your cap, sunshine?"

Hurst saw the shore patrol of four men and a ship's corporal. The corporal's gaze shifted down from Hurst's bare head to his bleeding forearm. "Here, what happened to you?"

"Three of them tried to roll me. I chased them off with this." Hurst threw the post aside now

The corporal recalled what he knew of Hurst: said to be a real bright lad, quiet, no particular mate aboard ship, cool and self-contained. That all fitted with the young man in front of him now. He said, "We'll get that arm seen to and then take you back to the ship."

Ajax waited – for history.

3

"Enough rope to hang them!"

In London, Hannah Fitzsimmons met Smith in the Ritz bar at noon. In her three-inch high heels she stood eye to eye with him. Her hair shone like copper and her silk dress, plain and expensive, was worn with a casual elegance that turned heads. She had dithered twice through her large wardrobe before deciding on that particular dress.

Seated with a Martini, brows wrinkling over green eyes, she said, "One memory keeps bugging me, I can't figure it out. Just before you blasted that rubble down in front of the car, those escorts of mine all leaned forward as if they were looking for something they expected to show."

Smith nodded, and she asked, "That doesn't surprise you?"

"They arranged your transfer two days ahead. I thought that was odd. If they were told to transfer you, then why not just send you? Why arrange a programme forty-eight hours ahead? Unless someone else wanted time to prepare."

He wore a dark grey suit of good but out-dated cut; ancient. Hannah thought that no wife would allow him to wear that suit. But here and now he was inconspicuous, a quiet man smiling slightly, easily. He was very different from the cold eyed, harsh-voiced guerrilla who had manhandled her out of Spain. She wondered what it was about him that still excited her. She also thought, but aloud: "You're suggesting there was skulduggery between the Spanish and the Germans?"

"It's possible," said Smith. "It fits. You were an embarrassment to Franco's men. They'd caught you as a spy but if they executed you they would antagonise Uncle Sam. At the same time they couldn't back down and let you off. Now, if you were abducted from Spain by persons unknown, then

they would be off the hook."

Hannah said slowly, "OK. But why should that German ship haul me out of there? What was her name?"

"*Brandenburg*," Smith answered absently. "A cruiser. She usually sails in company with *Graf Spee*, one of their pocket battleships, but she was on her own that night. I seem to remember you wrote some articles about the German Condor Legion bombing Guernica. You talked of baby-killing."

"Damn right, I did." Hannah's lips tightened.

"Maybe the idea was for you to surface in Germany and make a retraction of all those statements. You're a correspondent with an international reputation and it would make an impression. There would still be plenty of damning accounts by others but one retraction would introduce a note of doubt."

Hannah was shaking her head, "The hell with that. I would not retract. Not a word. So where would that leave them?"

"No worse off. But you – " He paused.

Hannah prompted, "Me?"

"You wouldn't surface." That was said quietly, but with certainty. "The people in power there now are capable of that and do it every day. And there is worse to come. You know that."

Hannah did. She was still a moment then took a breath, "Changing the subject. I wanted to meet you like this, just to say thank you. When I asked the Admiralty to pass on my invitation they tried to pretend they knew nothing about you. Until I said I'd print the whole story. So here we are and you have my thanks."

Smith grinned and lifted his glass in acknowledgment. Hannah would not settle for that: "Well, we weren't formally introduced, so for the record, I got into this business as a foreign correspondent, back in the early twenties. I've been running around Europe and the rest of the world ever since. Married once but it didn't take. There were no kids, thank God. What about the life of Smith? Or should I mind my own damn business?" She saw his fingers tighten around the glass and thought, Oh, hell!

But that was only an instinctive reaction. Smith was already telling himself that his life was not unusual and he'd had long enough to become used to it. Just starting was the trouble . . . He said, "I was married. Now I'm divorced." He stuck there.

Hannah nodded, "Sure. You're a naval officer. You can't tell me what you do or where you've been doing it. But it broke up your marriage."

Smith temporised. "The marriage broke up. We were in the East. My duties took me away a lot and Elizabeth, my wife, was left alone too long. She divorced me around the time you started this job – in the early twenties. She took our daughter with her and later she married a German businessman that she met in the States: Ulrich Bauer. They live in Berlin. I haven't seen Elizabeth or Sarah since before the divorce, not for sixteen or seventeen years."

Hannah asked softly, "Can I see a photo of your daughter?"

Smith shook his head, "I don't have one with me." He did not explain that in his work you did not carry photographs. Besides, he was ashamed that he did not have one, thought that a father should. But then out of impulse, surprisingly relaxed with this woman, he said, "I'd like to see her."

"So why don't you?"

Smith said simply, "She won't remember me." And God help him, he could not recall her face. He went on quickly, "When we were divorced I told Elizabeth I wouldn't keep any hold on the child. I couldn't offer her anything, the way I lived." Frequently on the move, sometimes running for his life, always in danger. How could he explain that? So he ploughed on doggedly, "I knew she was happy with Elizabeth and I thought it would be better if she were brought up as if she were Bauer's daughter. And it's a bit late to try to claim a share of the affection of some young woman who wouldn't know me if she walked in here now." He switched the conversation. "*Were* you spying?"

Hannah shrugged. "Sure. I heard another Guernica-type raid was planned and sent a tip-off." Smith grinned.

Over lunch Hannah told him a lot more about herself. He was interesting and sometimes amusing, they laughed a lot,

but he told nothing of himself except in answer to a direct question – and sometimes not then. She saw that was not secrecy; he was just a man who did not talk about himself. When they parted afterwards she waited for him to ask but he did not. So she did, "We must do this again."

Smith found himself apologising to this very attractive woman with genuine regret. "I'm going away for a few weeks."

Hannah chuckled, "I know – business. So call me when you get back." And she got his promise.

And later she thought that he was a lone man but not lonely, the most self-sufficient man she had met.

Brandenburg berthed in her home port of Wilhelmshaven in the grey light that comes before dawn. A car waited on the quayside for Fritsch and Kurt Larsen, a gleaming black Mercedes 260 with an SS pennon fluttering from the bonnet. A wireless signal had warned them and they were ready. Both wore uniform, Kurt in dark blue, Fritsch in the black with silver piping of the SS with the three silver stars of his rank on the collar patches and the ceremonial dagger swinging against his left hip. He wore gleaming high boots and his cap with the tall front bore the silver death's head. Each carried a copy of his report on the failed kidnapping. The driver swung the Mercedes out onto the road, put his foot down and drove like fury.

They were in Berlin before noon and the Mercedes slid to a halt outside the *Gestapo* headquarters in Prinz Albrecht Strasse. Inside they were conducted to the office of a *Standartenfuhrer* whose boots had a higher gloss even than those of Fritsch. He seated them and then read the reports carefully. He was a young man to Kurt's eyes, in his late twenties, though his rank was the equivalent of that of a naval captain. Kurt wondered wryly if he should have joined the SS where the promotion seemed to be quicker. But then he admitted he only wanted to be a naval officer, that was his life.

Kurt had a vague respect for the SS, leaving Fritsch aside. They were the Fuhrer's bodyguard, an elite. True, you heard some nasty rumours about some of the *Gestapo* but

there were always a few bastards in every organisation. Doubtless they would be weeded out. Kurt had been serving off the coast of Spain for more than three years and before that had spent most of his time at sea.

The *Standartenfuhrer* laid down the reports and tapped them with a long finger. "What it comes down to is that this other party snapped her out from under your noses." Fritsch muttered excuses but Kurt nodded agreement: that was the fact. The SS man eyed him across the wide desk and tapped Kurt's report again. "You suggest that party may have been British, or British led."

"The Spanish *Guardias* in the car said that one of the party spoke to the woman in English. That doesn't prove anything, but there was a Royal Navy ship in the vicinity. And I saw the man who carried off the woman. He was not Spanish. And the launch that took them was also Royal Navy, I'm sure of it."

The *Standartenfuhrer* glanced at his watch and stood up. "Well, you lost her." He looked down his nose at Fritsch. "We can't get at her now. Never mind, we'll keep her on the books. Another time."

Fritsch looked sulky but he was subject to the SS discipline. Kurt Larsen was unmoved, he was a naval officer and his captain had already exonerated him from any blame.

They took their leave and as they descended the stairs Fritsch shrugged and blustered. "To hell with him. My uncle ranks higher than *Standartenfuhrer*. I'll survive."

They were outside now, Fritsch pulling on his gloves and leading the way to the Mercedes parked at the kerb. Then he halted abruptly and lifted a hand to the peak of his cap in casual salute, inclining his head in a gesture of a bow. "Fräulein Bauer."

The girl he greeted was small and slight, thin-faced, her blonde hair cut short and waved. Her eyes were wide and deep blue, icy as they met those of Fritsch. She did not speak but returned the bow with a nod.

Kurt Larsen detected that chilliness but did not pause to wonder. He also saluted and Fritsch had perforce to introduce them. "Fraulein Bauer, *Oberleutnant zur See* Kurt Larsen." He went on to explain, "The Fraulein and I met in

the way of duty, but I trust we are friends now."

The girl did not answer that Fritsch was already glancing past her to the waiting Mercedes, the driver standing by its opened door. But Kurt had had enough of Fritsch and the SS. He smiled, "It's a beautiful day. If the Fraulein does not object I will accompany her for a while."

The girl shrugged Fritsch's lips tightened, as if he thought she needed a lesson in manners when extended an invitation by an officer of the Reich. He summoned Kurt with a jerk of the head as he walked on towards the car. With one foot on its running board he paused to murmur, "She's a pretty little piece and I wouldn't kick her out of bed. But be warned· we are interested in the family. The father has been reported as being critical of the Party and the State. We searched the house and questioned every one of them We found nothing seditious and then we got orders from higher up to back off. I think we're giving them enough rope to hang themselves." He poked Kurt in the ribs and winked as he climbed into the car. "So take what offers but don't get involved." Then before Kurt could speak the door slammed, the driver slid into his seat and the Mercedes pulled away.

Kurt muttered his opinion of Fritsch then turned to find the girl waiting. She asked stiffly, "I beg your pardon?"

He grinned at her, "I was just using a derogatory naval expression to describe Herr Fritsch. It is obscene and I did not intend to speak it aloud in your hearing."

The girl's lips twitched. As they turned and began to walk side by side she inspected him covertly from the corner of her eye. The two uniforms had repelled her. That ominous black and silver creation worn by Fritsch was too familiar, from the time of the search and the fear and from the man who still came to the house: Werner.

This young man beside her was different There was an openness in his face and manner that was like a breath of fresh air. She was young and happiness came easily to her. In minutes they were laughing together. When they parted he had arranged to meet her again, and had privately decided he would spend with her any leave he could get from his ship. And he did so all that summer

But right from that beginning there were times when

Sarah said she could not meet him. There were nights when she drove her little MG sports car out of the garage of the house in the Wannsee district of Berlin, after telling her parents she was going to a party with friends and would be very late. They trusted her and she felt guilty but could not tell them the truth.

The nights followed a broad pattern, like the time she drove down to the industrial suburbs. There she was a long way from her comfortable, spacious home in the Wannsee. These were blocks of crowded tenements, the streets still holding the heat and smells of the day. The MG, a present from her stepfather, Ulrich Bauer, was almost new and stood out in that neighbourhood. That was a risk and she knew it. She had put up the hood and closed the side windows, though this was early summer and the night was warm.

Sarah pulled into the kerb halfway along one block. It was late and the streets seemed empty, but then she saw movement and two policemen paced out of the darkness into the circle of light shed by a street-lamp. That had happened before on another night, in another place. So she stayed cool, put the car in gear and drove around the block, halting again a hundred yards short of the end of the street she had just left. She had tucked the little MG into a patch of deep shadow in the lee of a high wall and between two lamps. She switched off the engine and lights, then waited.

After a minute or two Sarah saw the two policemen emerge from the street ahead. If they came towards her she was ready to back into a nearby alley and drive off again, but they turned and walked off in the other direction. When they had gone round another corner she started the car and drove back to where she had first stopped.

There she waited again, but this time with the engine running. As soon as the car had rolled to a halt she had seen the man hiding in the doorway of one of the tenements. He stood in near pitch darkness but Sarah had expected to see him there, looked for him and so picked out the shadow, blacker than the others, that moved. This, too, she had seen before, knew the man was afraid and with good reason. He must have seen the police walk by.

So Sarah gave him a little time to pluck up his courage but then reached across the front seat to open the door on the passenger's side. She called urgently, softly, "Come! I cannot wait!" He still hesitated for a moment on the threshold, peering up and down the street but then trotted across the pavement with his bundle held tightly under his arm and ducked into the car.

Sarah knew that he was a man in his forties though he looked much older. But then all of them did and it was because of the fear. She could smell it on him in the stuffy confines of the little sports car. By then they were moving; she had eased the MG into gear and let out the clutch before he had shut the door behind him. Sarah drove the car decorously out of the city but then put her foot down. She spoke to him only once: "Just sit quietly." And he obeyed her.

In the early hours of the morning the MG drew up in a narrow country road a score of yards behind a lorry already parked there without lights. Sarah switched off her own. A man got down from the driving seat of the lorry and walked back to open the passenger's door of the MG. He was a few years older than Sarah, hollow-cheeked, eyes shifting nervously. He said, "Climb into the back." And pointed at the lorry.

As Sarah's passenger worked stiffly out of the cramped seat of the little car she wished him, "Good luck!"

Out in the road he straightened and paused, clutching the bundle. Then he said huskily, as if his throat was raw with weeping, "Luck? I had a wife and family, owned a house and a store. All I have left is my life. But I thank you for it."

He walked away and clambered up into the back of the lorry, crawling under its tarpaulin tilt. Its driver, his fingers tapping worriedly on the canvas roof of the MG, watched him and muttered, 'Poor bastard. But he'll be over the border by morning. It is *we* who need the luck. There are too many people involved in the organisation, too many chances of a mistake. They only have to catch one." Sarah knew that 'they' were the *Gestapo*.

But he went back to the lorry then and drove it away. Sarah returned to the city and fell into bed as the dawn

broke.

Jake Tyler woke in that dawn to the hammering of the steam winches outside his cabin aboard the SS *Sotheby*. He crawled from his bunk, worked sleepily into trousers, sweater and old canvas shoes then went out onto the deck. The *Sotheby* was anchored off the coast of Brazil, to be exact in the estuary of a river Jake could just see one bank of the river as a low-lying shore spiked with buildings on the southern horizon. The opposite bank was ten miles away and below the northern horizon.

Jake stared at the distant town and said, "Is that it?"

The young Second Mate leaning on the rail nearby grinned and answered, "It is. About a thousand people ashore there, most of them German immigrants, about two hundred on the other bank where the quarry is." He cocked a thumb over his shoulder and spoke in a Yorkshire accent. The *Sotheby* was a British ship that pottered up and down the coasts of the USA and South America. This was one of her regular stops She had anchored in the night and would be on her way south again before noon.

Jake asked, "Have you seen this town?"

"Two or three times when somebody has had to go ashore, like one of the crew needing a doctor. The lighter takes us in. The ship always anchors out here because there's only a little harbour and it won't take a vessel of any size. There's only a depth of water of about eight or ten feet."

The lighter was closing on the *Sotheby* now, a steel box of a craft lying low in the water, her diesel engine thumping steadily. There was one man in the little wheelhouse perched right aft. The Mate went on, "The *Mary Ellen* comes out and we unload the cargo for this place into her. Mike Garrity, that's the old feller at the helm now, he takes it ashore or across the river to the quarry. He's her owner and skipper. Makes a living at it, though he admits he only works three or four days a week."

Jake watched the lighter as she edged in alongside the *Sotheby*. She was painted a drab black overall but little rust showed and she looked clean. Lines snaked down from the deck of the ship and the skipper of the lighter cut her engine

and jumped out of the wheelhouse, ran forward to seize and secure the line there then dashed aft to do the same

The Mate asked, "What are you going to do in Montevideo? Got a job?"

Jake shook his head, "I don't know." Almost all his savings had gone to pay for his passage. He had a small income from a bequest but it was not enough to live on. What he wanted was time to decide what to do with his life, whether it took a week or ten years . . . Mike Garrity only worked three or four days a week. So . . . The winches were chugging again aboard the *Sotheby* and the first net laden with cargo came swinging up out of the hold then swayed out over the side of the ship at the end of a derrick's boom.

Jake made a funnel of his hands to bawl down, "Hey! Skipper! I hear you're on your own!"

Mike Garrity was short and skinny so that the boilersuit he wore hung loose like the skin on an elephant's rump. His hair had been combed with his fingers that morning. It showed grey at the sides and in the stubble on his jaw. He peered up at Jake and answered, "One o' your crew'll give me a hand."

Jake pointed at the distant harbour, "What about when you get in there?"

"Stevedores." Garrity answered absently, his attention on the wire hawser as it ran out from the boom and the net dropped towards the lighter.

Jake told him, "You need a crew."

Garrity shook his head: "I make a living because I don't support nobody else, I don't *pay* nobody."

Jake moved along the rail to where the ladder hung down the ship's side to the lighter. "I've got a proposition for you." He swung his leg over the rail and started to climb down. He called up to the Mate, "I'll be back for my baggage in a coupla minutes!"

Smith spent some weeks in a room in a *pension* in Perpignan. There he met the men who had worked for him in Spain as they made their way out over the border, one way or another. Some would never come out and Smith made what provision he could for their widows. On the day

he bade farewell to the last of them he vacated the room to walk to the station. On the way he cabled to Hannah Fitzsimmons, promising to take her to dinner the following evening. He thought he owed her that.

His rented flat in London was cold and empty. When the doorbell rang he answered it and found a middle-aged man in a neat but shiny blue serge suit, a raincoat carefully folded over his arm. He asked, "Captain Smith, sir?"

"Yes?"

The man's shoes creaked as he fumbled in an inside pocket then took a pace forward to hand the visiting card to Smith. The card bore a printed name and rank, but under them were pencilled the words: "At once."

Smith asked, "You have a car?"

"Taxi waiting downstairs, sir."

So Smith handed his case to the messenger and locked up the flat again.

Hannah Fitzsimmons had been dressed and waiting for an hour when he telephoned and apologised. She gripped the instrument and took a deep, steadying breath before asking, "You're going abroad again – and now? Where, for God's sake? Oh! Yes, I understand. No, think nothing of it. Some other time. Gimme a raincheck." Then he was gone.

Exasperated, Hannah wondered for a moment if this was a brush-off. Then she discarded the idea. Neither flight nor subterfuge was Smith's style.

But what the hell was he up to in Poland?

4

The Enigma Run

That day in early August was hot with the heaviness of thunder in the air. Ulrich Bauer's house in the Wannsee, Berlin, seemed airless although the windows were opened wide. He knew the heat was causing him to sweat, making him irritable, and he made a conscious effort to be patient and reasonable. This girl was not his child but he was fond of her. She seemed quiet on first sight, but had a quick temper. She would sit curled up and still only to suddenly burst into action at the least provocation. Ulrich said mildly, "Your mother and I thought you were happy here with us This is the first time you've suggested leaving."

He glanced across at Elizabeth, his wife, biting her lip with mystification and worry as she watched her daughter. He and Elizabeth sat on a couch but Sarah stood at the window, her back turned to them Ulrich's lips tightened as he asked of that back, "And why? There must be a reason. You suddenly say you want to leave Berlin, leave Germany, but you find no fault with us, the house, your work. You have your own car and come and go as you please, though your mother and I are concerned over some of your late nights. And the young man, Kurt Larsen, you seemed happy with him yet you're ready to cast him off. Why?"

Sarah did not turn but she answered, "I like Kurt and I think he's fond of me, but that's all."

Elizabeth said quietly, "There is a reason "

Sarah nodded, "Yes." She hesitated, then added, "In fact, two of them."

Ulrich frowned, "What are they?"

Sarah took a breath and confessed, "Those late nights you spoke of – for some time now I've been a member of an organisation for smuggling people out of the country Some

of them are Jews, others on the run from the *Gestapo*. I heard only an hour ago that one of our members has been arrested. He may talk."

For a moment Elizabeth and Ulrich could only look from Sarah to each other as they took in the enormity of what she had told them. Then Ulrich said grimly, "He will talk. No maybe about it. And you have to get out of Germany, there's no argument about that, now." Then he remembered and asked, "And the other reason?"

Sarah exploded in temper, "It's your cousin Werner in his bloody black uniform! He asks you to put him up for the night, brings a bottle of wine, flowers for Mother. Then he tries to force his way into my room "

Elizabeth paled and Ulrich's hands clenched into fists. Sarah went on more quietly, her voice shaking, "I'm sorry. But now he says he has been keeping the *Gestapo* off our backs and if I don't – cooperate . . . " She fell silent at the thoughts conjured up.

Ulrich rubbed at his face then put out his hand to Elizabeth but spoke to Sarah, "That is an empty threat. I apologise for Werner and he won't enter this house again." He glanced at his wife, "Elizabeth and I have talked a lot about him and his kind lately So far I've gone along with this so-called National Socialism that Hitler and his cronies preach. I've complained and protested but I've stayed in line. Now I find I can't do that any longer. I've been invited to speak at a meeting next week. I know what they want me to say but I won't do it this time, I won't be a 'yes-man'. I'll speak my mind. It will make me even more unpopular than I am already in certain quarters but this is my country and I am not alone; there are others. And someone has to speak out. I'm not afraid of Werner and his friends. I will have committed no crime and I am a prominent member of the business community. They daren't touch me." He squeezed Elizabeth's hand, "But you go with Sarah Please."

"Next week! I didn't know it would be so soon." Elizabeth bit her lip, then she shook her head. "We've already talked this out. You will do what you believe is right. So will I." She had broken and run once before, and always regretted it. She would not do it again.

And Ulrich, who knew he would not move her, kissed her.

Elizabeth smiled at him, then at Sarah. "You must go to your father." She saw the girl's start of surprise and explained, "I had a letter from him only yesterday. He's in the Bristol Hotel in Warsaw, attached to the Embassy there for some weeks." Elizabeth did not say that Smith had written because he believed a war was coming and had warned: "If you and Sarah are caught in Berlin then as British subjects you may well find yourselves in danger."

Her father? Sarah remembered when she and her mother had last spoken of him, when Elizabeth had applied for Sarah's British passport and told her, "You have your father's name of Smith but you were called Bauer in Berlin because we thought it would be easier for you. When I married again your father wrote to say he would not insist on access to you; he thought those visits might only upset you. But he was always ready to bear a father's responsibilities and I had only to contact him."

Sarah had said, "He can't take me away!"

"Of course not. And he isn't an ogre."

So Sarah had slipped back into her own world of the present, happy with her mother and Ulrich Bauer. But now? She looked from one to the other and pleaded, "You must both come with me! You cannot speak out! They won't let you!" And more. And she wept. But they would not be moved.

Next day they travelled by train to Rugen and Sarah took passage on a steamer bound for Malmo in Sweden. Few Germans were trying to cross the border into Poland. From Malmo she would cross to the Polish port of Gdynia. Sarah waved to her parents where they stood on the quayside under the harsh lights. But as her ship drew away she had an awful premonition that she was going out into the world on her own.

Six thousand miles away, off the coast of South America, Able Seaman Robert Hurst wrote his letter on the end of the table on the mess deck of HMS *Ajax*. The cruiser was out of Bahia Blanca and bound for Rio de Janeiro. She was one of

the four ships in Commodore Harwood's squadron off the coast of South America. Besides the other light cruiser *Achilles* there were the bigger, 8-inch gun cruisers *Exeter* and *Cumberland*. *Ajax* was almost new, a slender, lovely ship mounting eight 6-inch guns in four turrets, two forward and two aft.

Hurst had not been long in *Ajax*. He was known as quiet, reliable and studious, often with his nose buried in a book so he was sometimes called 'Professor'. He fitted in and did his share of the work but had no particular friend. His detachment was accepted by most of the men around him, who dismissed it as his business.

The knife-scar on his forearm was barely visible now, burned brown by the sun. He wrote steadily, knew what he wanted to say and set it down, neatly and methodically. He also wrote with affection, relating his doings and the events of the cruise. He said nothing in the letter to his guardian of the girl he expected to meet in Rio.

He paused once, thoughts harking back. His guardian had kept a pub on Tyneside and Hurst grew up on the quay and next to the ships, happily As he day-dreamed now he absently watched Bill Donovan squaring up to a big signalman on the other side of the mess deck. Donovan was one of the biggest, certainly the strongest man aboard and always sparring He was a boxer. He ducked and weaved, hands moving as quick as light, until he caught Hurst's bleak, impersonal stare when he stood back and demanded, "What's up wi' you, Professor?"

Hurst blinked, crooked one corner of his mouth in a half-smile but then bent again to his letter Donovan stared at the lowered head then shook his own.

Most of the foreign correspondents in Warsaw stayed at the Europejski Hotel in the Pilsudski Square that was expensive, archaic and uncomfortable. But Hannah Fitzsimmons made some discreet telephone calls first and then took a room at the Hotel Bristol Smith was registered there in his own name and she bumped into him in the bar on her first evening: "Well, hello!"

The three men with him looked surprised but Smith did

not. He said, "Excuse me." The other three nodded to her and went on, leaving him alone with Hannah.

She said cheerfully, "My editor, his London mouthpiece that is, sent me out here because of the crisis." And because she had begged, demanded and threatened: "All right, so I just got back from Spain! But we all know Poland will be the next big story and I'll get it for you. Or for Associated Press! So what d'you say?"

Now she went on, "There's talk of war but so there was when Hitler went into Austria and Czechoslovakia. Will Germany fight? Will Poland? Will Britain and France? Any ideas? And what are you doing in Warsaw, anyway?"

Smith took her arm and led her towards the bar, "I'll buy you a drink." And when he handed her the glass he said, "I'm here as a university professor, a colleague of those three gentlemen. Will you remember that, please?"

"OK." She smiled at him, "Any story for me?"

But he only grinned at her and shook his head. He took her into the restaurant for dinner, glad to see her. He told himself that was because it had been a long time since he had enjoyed the company of an attractive woman. Hannah, always elegant, turned heads.

She returned the compliment the following evening. Hannah talked about her work and Smith talked about – hers. He never gave a reason for being in Poland. Nor did he explain the other three men. They were British, and from snatches of their conversation she would have judged them to be academics, possibly university professors, but now she wondered. Early one morning as she stood at her window she saw Smith go off with the three in a car that picked them up at the door of the hotel. At other times she would find Smith in their company in the bar but he would excuse himself to them and go off with her. He never introduced her.

He saw the curiosity in her eyes, the unspoken question: What's going on? He could not tell her that two of the men were cryptographers and the third was Colonel Stewart Menzies, head of the British Secret Intelligence Service.

Smith was sent out from London with the instruction: "You're to bring out a package. It might be dangerous." In

Warsaw he learned that the three in the Bristol were watched by German agents – and so was he. One or two of the agents were known to the Polish anti-espionage police, but they were sure there were others.

On the morning he accompanied the three in the car they were taken at speed by the Polish driver to the Pyry forest and a concealed, dank, concrete bunker. They showed him what looked like the carrying case for a large portable typewriter and told him, "You'll be carrying something like this."

He asked, "What is it?"

"It's called an Enigma. It is a coding machine." And they opened the case so he could see the rotors and switches inside. "But yours will be like this only on the outside. Inside there'll be just a couple of bricks." The case was closed then patted lovingly with the flat of the hand. "The Poles have given us two of these. They are the machines used by all the German armed forces. With these, and a lot of work, and luck, we will read every signal they make. Without them we will be fighting in the dark. You see their importance?"

Smith nodded. "But you want me to take a dummy."

"The French are sending both machines out in their diplomatic bag." The French mission were there in the bunker that morning, listening and watching, as were the Polish officers. "But our German friends are suspicious and they know we are getting *something* from the Poles. We think they may try to snatch whatever we carry when we leave Poland. We wouldn't put it past them to attempt to steal the diplomatic bag. If they succeeded it would be disastrous. They would know we could crack their coded signals and therefore take action to prevent it. So we're going to start a hare for them to chase. Then we and the Enigmas can quietly steal away."

They waited for his reaction, as he coldly accepted that he had been named as a moving target. But he also accepted that this was a risk that had to be taken, and nodded.

He only went once more to the bunker in the forest and that was in the first week in August. When he returned with the other three that night he carried the 'Enigma' case. He tried to speak to Hannah Fitzsimmons but she was out of the

hotel and he presumed she was chasing a story or being briefed with other correspondents in the Press Section of the Polish Foreign Office in a corner of the Pilsudski Square.

He went to his room, packed his razor and toothbrush in a spongebag and thrust it into a pocket of his trenchcoat. It had been cleaned since Spain but was worn and ancient. He threw it over his shoulder, picked up the case and left. As the taxi he had ordered pulled up outside the Bristol another stopped behind it and Hannah Fitzsimmons got out.

She stared at the case and asked, "Is that a typewriter?"

Smith answered, "Sort of. Look, I'm sorry, but I have to catch a train. I'm going back to London." He held out his hand.

Hannah took it, saying, "Have a good trip." And thinking, Oh, boy, here we go again!

Smith stooped to enter the car and Hannah watched it drive away. And wondered why Smith wore a pistol in a shoulder holster.

He shoved into a crowded compartment on the night train to Gdynia, squashed in a corner with the 'Enigma' under the seat and tucked in behind his legs. The German agents could not get at him here, among a dozen strangers. Gdynia was the Polish port in the Danzig corridor, their only exit to the sea, and he knew a British destroyer, HMS *Lancer*, lay in the harbour. And a car would be waiting at the station to take him aboard. He settled down for the night, trenchcoat wrapped around him and hat pulled down over his eyes, hand tucked inside his jacket with fingers curled around the butt of the Colt.

Before sleep came he found that he was sad. Sad to leave the American woman behind, and that war was almost upon them. Surely when it came they would give him a ship.

The train pulled into Gdynia before the dawn, under lights like furred globes seeming suspended in the mist. Smith picked up the case in his left hand then got down from the train, moving with the crowd but wary now, here they could strike and run. He covered fifty yards at a stroll, hemmed in by the people flooding from the train now at the end of the line, shuffling towards the exit.

He saw them from the corner of his eye when they were still a dozen yards away on either hand. One was closing from the right, the other from the left. They both wore raincoats and edged laterally through the shuffling stream. They did not turn their heads to look at him but he knew they had him in view. He was the target.

He could see no police ahead but he would not have been allowed to reach them. The train was on his right while on his left and some twenty to thirty yards away stood a long row of stores or offices, some opened and lit, some closed.

The one on the left came first, a big man and thick-set, fleshy-faced, confident. As his shoulder came up against Smith the man's left hand came out of his raincoat pocket and reached across his thick body. It held a pistol; Smith thought it looked like a Luger, posing a threat but not actually pointing at him. The man said, "Give me the case." His hand groped for its handle, fumbling at Smith's fingers. Smith drew the Colt and smashed it on the extended wrist that held the Luger.

The big man screamed at that hammer blow, dropped the pistol and let go of the case to clutch instead at his shattered wrist. Smith slid in front of him, stamping on his instep so he cried out again, elbowing him away towards the other man now charging in from the right. They collided and tangled.

Smith tucked the Colt away but kept his hand on it, shouldered his way through the crowd and emerged in a kind of shallow at the side of the main stream. Here where the crowd was thinner he could walk more quickly. He passed what seemed to be a waiting room because it might not have had another exit. Then he saw the high, vaulted room with its floor stacked with sacks. Mail? But what mattered was the sight of the street beyond. He passed through and one voice called an enquiry, another a command, the words of neither understood but their tones clear. Then he was outside the station and walking rapidly down to a car that waited by the kerb.

He asked the young naval officer standing beside it, "I think you may be expecting me. Smith."

The sub-lieutenant had been searching the distance but now his gaze came down to the slight figure in the old

trenchcoat and slouch hat. Pale blue eyes crinkled at the corners as the man smiled. The sub thought this foreign-looking, shabby character did not look like a Royal Navy captain, though God knew they were rarely fashion plates when they went ashore. He said quickly, "Captain Smith for *Lancer*. Yes, sir." He yanked open the door and asked, "Good journey, sir?"

"Quiet." Smith ducked into the car. He did not see the slender, fair-haired girl pass by and hurry into the station for the Warsaw train.

Sarah, intent on finding her way in a strange place and catching that train, did not see him.

5

Murder

In the forenoon the sunlight was brilliant, sparking from the surface of the Baltic. *Oberleutnant* Kurt Larsen stood on the bridge of *Brandenburg*. She was engaged in exercises with the *Panzerschuff Graf Spee*, now steaming ahead of her. Moehle, captain of *Brandenburg*, sat in his high chair at the front of the bridge with Paul Brunner, his Executive Officer, at his side.

Kurt thought they were both in a good humour, particularly Moehle, and that was easy to understand. He had a fine ship, lean and fast, capable of thirty two knots, only four years old and mounting nine 6-inch guns in three turrets. She was a ship to be proud of, as Kurt was proud. And the men, her crew, lived up to her. They had proved their skill and efficiency over this last year and now as the summer waned they were bronzed and fit.

The messenger who came quickly onto the bridge handed a signal flimsy to Moehle, who glanced at it and read, "From OKM . . ." That was *Oberkommando der Marine*, Supreme Naval Headquarters ". . . addressed to *Graf Spee* and ourselves. We are to return to Wilhelmshaven immediately." He passed the signal to Brunner and sat in thought.

Until Brunner said, low voiced so the bridge staff would not hear, "You think this might be it?"

Moehle nodded, "I think so." He turned, saw Larsen and told him with a smile, "Keep quiet about my theorising, Kurt. The men will know when I know and am able to tell them. I don't want rumours flying that 'the old man thinks'."

Kurt grinned back at him, "I will, sir."

"Signal from the flagship!" That was the signal yeoman, telescope to his eye.

Moehle had already seen the flags climbing the halyards of

Graf Spee. He said, "Be ready for the change of course."

Brandenburg altered course a minute later in accordance with the signal from *Graf Spee*, turned into her wake with both ships bound for home. Kurt Larsen watched the *Panzerschiff* ahead. He thought, There is a killer. Six 11-inch guns and twenty-eight knots, eleven hundred men aboard. There were only three ships in all the Royal Navy both fast enough to catch her and big enough to fight her. She could stand off, out of any cruiser's range, and smash them to pieces with those big, long-range guns.

He turned to glance at the British destroyer, sighted distantly some ten minutes ago but now passing astern and identified as HMS *Lancer*. She looked to be bound for the Skaggerak – and then England? He wondered if her officers were measuring the might of the *Panzerschiff*.

Smith paused in his restless pacing to stand in the waist of *Lancer* and stare across at the two ships on the sunlit sea. He asked a passing seaman, "Do you know what ships those are?"

"Yes, sir. Up on the bridge they say *Graf Spee*, one o' them 'pocket battleships', and *Brandenburg*, light cruiser, sir."

Smith answered, "Thank you." Just a few months ago *Brandenburg* had been off Spain and some of her men might have killed him. He wondered if that young officer was still aboard her. He had locked a tough nut.

And so did *Graf Spee*, while *Brandenburg* would be a handful for any light cruiser. When war came, if those two went raiding . . .

Hannah was intercepted in the foyer of the Bristol by a neatly-suited under-manager. He was a young man, barely thirty and eager to please. "Miss Fitzsimmons! You will pardon me, but – a young lady is asking for Captain Smith. She says he was staying here and she is his daughter. I wonder if Mr Smith was the same man? You were friends? Do you know if he will come back soon? The other three gentlemen, they did not say, but I wondered if, possibly, Mr Smith . . ." He paused there, hopefully.

But Hannah shook her head and replied blandly, "We are friends but he isn't a captain and I'm sure he is not coming back. Still, maybe I can help this girl. Where is she?"

The girl was sexually attractive, that was Hannah's first and lasting impression. Sarah sat in the bar, fingers tapping on the table, brow wrinkled. Hannah checked at the door for a moment, watching her. There was the fair hair and blue eyes but no immediate resemblance to Smith in the delicate features. But then there was a hint about the wide mouth of determination – or stubbornness – or sensuality. That conjured up memories . . .

Hannah went in and stopped by the girl. "Excuse me, but the manager said you were asking about Mr Smith. I know him. I'm Hannah Fitzsimmons."

The blue eyes looked up at her, eagerly at first, then guardedly. "I am his daughter, Sarah. If we're talking about the same man?" Sarah decided this woman with the American accent was not pretty but certainly good looking, attractive. She also thought, for the first time but not the last, I wish I could dress like that.

"Your father is a captain in the Royal Navy, though this hotel doesn't know that and he doesn't want it to." Then Hannah delved in her memory and recalled, "You're from Berlin."

"That's right. Did he tell you about me?"

"Just that you were in Berlin."

"Oh!" Now Sarah wondered just what relationship there was between her father and this woman.

Hannah guessed at that. "We were friends, just the other side of acquaintances really, because he got me out of a very nasty spot and we used to eat dinner together when he was here."

"I see." Sarah accepted that as truth, but wondered if it was all of the truth.

Hannah said, "So you came to see him."

"I – hoped to stay with him, although I don't know him at all." Sarah sounded hesitant. "I just have vague memories of him from when I was young."

Hannah thought ruefully, So what are you now, child? She said, "He went back to England. I don't think he'll come

here again. Will you follow him?"

Sarah frowned down at the table, wanting to keep distance between this woman and herself But Hannah Fitzsimmons had seen her father only days before and knew him Curiosity won. Sarah looked up at Hannah and asked, "What's he like?"

Hannah remembered him snatching her from the car in Spain. "He's – quite a guy A gentleman "

Sarah thought for a moment then made up her mind "I'd love to go after him, but I must telegraph to my parents to let them know I'm safe and when I hear that they are all right, then I'll think of going to London Will you be writing to him?" That was a probing question and Hannah hesitated Sarah saw that hesitation and said, "I'm sorry That's none of my business But if you do, please don't tell him I'm here I told you I can't remember my father The truth is that I hardly ever thought of him, and I don't want to be seen as begging now In a week or two I'll meet him So promise?"

Hannah hesitated, then said firmly, "I won't be writing to him and I won't tell him."

"Thank you I'll let you know if I change my mind "

Those last words held Hannah off at arm's length and she acknowledged it, thought, OK, honey At your age and in your position maybe I'd be careful just who I trusted And she remembered the self sufficiency of the father and decided, drily, that the same trait had come down to the daughter.

But Sarah telegraphed to Ulrich Bauer and her mother every day for a week, without receiving a reply Hannah found out by asking directly, "Any word from your folks, honey?" She tried to comfort the girl "You'll hear from Berlin pretty soon I'll bet there's a simple, innocent reason for the delay " Sarah thanked her politely but Hannah also wondered uneasily why no answer came

She had a daily routine that started with a visit to the Press Section of the Polish Foreign Office in Pilsudski Square She then went on to lunch with the other correspondents at the Europejski Hotel and afterwards embarked on a succession of telephone calls and typing of reports That went on, with

only an interruption for dinner, until midnight or the small hours. But in between she contrived to seek out Sarah and noted the glances of the young Polish officers directed at the blonde, blue eyed girl. Hannah decided she would have to ride shotgun on Smith's daughter while realising that would not be easy. Sarah attracted men without trying and Hannah was no closer to the girl.

Sarah in her turn had watched Hannah and seen that she was on terms of easy familiarity and first names with men, both British and American, who came into the bar of the Bristol. She learned that they were all foreign correspondents and so was Hannah Fitzsimmons. To Sarah the men looked the part but the American woman, always beautifully dressed, did not. Was she in fact an adventuress?

Hannah gave her problem some thought and telephoned her editor in London. At the end of that week she told Sarah, "Say, I have to take a trip to sound out the feeling in the countryside. You know, what the ordinary guy and his wife think about this crisis with Germany. I have to take another girl along to share the driving because these Polish roads are hell." In fact she had been advised to hire a chauffeur. "And, well, just so I'm not on my own out in the sticks. I'm authorised to pay the going rate for the job. What d'you say?"

Sarah hesitated, said slowly, "Well . . . "

Hannah urged her, "I reckon it would be good for you to come along. You'll only worry yourself sick if you hang around here and you would be company for me. We'll phone the Bristol every night and they can read us your telegram when it comes." Hannah chuckled then, "And it will all be on expenses, kid! How about that?"

It was a factor Sarah had to consider because her funds were limited. Her stepfather had given her enough money to last her for a month or two and promised more but none had come. While she still reserved judgment on Hannah Fitzsimmons, she was growing to like the American woman with her easy smile. And Sarah was increasingly conscious of being alone. She accepted, "All right. Thank you."

They left the Bristol in a hired Ford with Sarah at the wheel on the morning of Thursday, 17 August. They had

lowered the hood because of the glorious summer weather and the baking heat that would rule by noon. Hannah was, or seemed to be, in holiday mood. "We'll take it in easy stages and wind up at Katowice at the end of the month."

Sarah asked, "Where is Katowice?"

"Down on the German border."

That night Smith left the British Embassy in Berlin after dark and walked to a side-street where a car waited. When the driver saw Smith he leaned over and shoved open the door on the passenger's side. Smith swung into the car and it pulled away. The driver said, "I didn't see anyone following you." Smith never knew his name, had only met him once before at a meeting arranged by the Embassy but outside of it. He wore a suit that was pressed but shiny with age. He blended into the background of the car, clean but shabby.

Smith shook his head. "One picked me up outside the Embassy but I dropped him." The tail, a policeman in a cheap suit and slouch hat, was still searching for Smith in a crowded *Bierkeller*.

They drove to the Wannsee. Smith intended to park a street away from the house of Ulrich and Elizabeth Bauer but when he saw the smoke and flames ahead he had a sense of foreboding and motioned to his driver to carry on. They stopped almost opposite the house, got out of the car and joined the watching crowd. The house was not large but stood in its own small garden. It burned from cellar to roof and the flames mounted twice the height of the house itself. Smith's driver muttered, "Jesus! They must have swamped the place in petrol for it to burn like that."

Smith did not ask who 'they' were. He stared at the firemen, the ineffectual hoses snaking across the street, the towering flames. He felt their heat on his face. He had come here to persuade Ulrich Bauer and Elizabeth to leave Germany. Word had gone to him in London from Intelligence sources and via the Embassy in Berlin that they were in danger now; Ulrich Bauer had spoken out too much and too loudly. That was common knowledge.

The car would have carried them over the border into Denmark before the morning light. Smith had forged papers

for them in his pocket. Both plan of escape and papers were useless now. The *Gestapo* had got there first.

The driver returned from sidling through the crowd and told Smith, "The cook reported the fire. She's over there, telling anybody who'll listen." He nodded to a little group gathered around a fat, gesticulating woman. "Only the Bauers were in the house. The old girl set out for home, as usual, ten minutes ago. She left them just starting a meal. She met a friend on the corner of the street and stood talking. Then she saw the house burst into flames. Says it exploded." He paused for a moment, squinting through narrowed eyes at the blaze, then finished bitterly, "I'll bet it did."

Smith asked, thinking of them in the flames and recoiling from the picture, "The daughter? Not her, too?"

"No."

"You're certain?"

"The cook said someone should tell the daughter but the girl left home a week or so ago, doesn't know where she went."

So was there some hope?

Smith said flatly, grieving and hiding it, "No point in waiting here." Elizabeth was dead. She had been as dead to him these last fifteen years but that had been his fault or that of circumstances, not hers. She had deserved happiness. This was murder.

The driver said, "Right. We'll get away." Then he added, "I'll be glad to get out of this country." He was German but had been promised refuge in Britain if war came. "Won't be long now." He started to shove back into the crowd, glancing over his shoulder at Smith who lingered for some seconds.

On the other side of the street Kurt Larsen elbowed his way through the gaping throng to reach the kerb. Sarah's house, which he had visited so often in recent months, now blazed to his left, beyond a cordon of police and firemen. Since *Graf Spee* and *Brandenburg* had been at Wilhelmshaven their crews had worked around the clock as the ships were docked and stored, prepared for a long cruise. Now he had just two days' leave and he had come to say farewell to

Sarah. He had written to her but received no reply for these last two weeks.

He stared open mouthed at the house, shocked, and jerked with reaction as did those around him when the roof fell in and sent up a cloud of sparks, smoke and flame. He winced and turned away. He, too, had learned that Herr and Frau Bauer had been in the house. He wondered where Sarah was –

It was then that he saw the face at the front of the crowd across the street. He had last seen it at night in the glow from the headlights of a car, eyes as cold and empty as the pistol barrel aimed at him. He glimpsed it now in the shifting, rippling orange glare of the flames but he knew it.

He started to run, checked for an instant as an ambulance came racing, uselessly, and whipped by him so close the draught of its passing snatched at his cap. He grabbed at it instinctively as the ambulance braked and halted a score of yards along the road. He ran on though the face had gone. The man had to be close and he was a spy, an enemy of the state.

Kurt charged through the spectators lining the pavement, collecting curses but ignoring them. He burst into the open with his head turning, searching for the man he pursued, but did not see him. He looked over the crowd again then ran to the nearest corner. He was just in time to see the rear lights of a car swing around at the end of the block and disappear from sight.

6

The Storm Breaks

Brandenburg sailed on the evening of Monday, 21 August 1939, following *Graf Spee* out of Wilhelmshaven. By noon on the 24th, they had slipped past any watching British ship and were south of Iceland. Kurt Larsen paced the deck below the bridge. He had shied away from reporting to the police his sighting in Berlin of the man he had last seen on the Spanish coast, could imagine their exchanges of glances. He had planned to tell his captain, Gustav Moehle, but when he got back to his ship he hesitated. He was ready, almost, to swear the man in the crowd and lit by the flames was the same he had seen in Spain. But a small, niggling doubt had come with time. Had he been mistaken? The light had not been good on either occasion. In the end he said nothing.

He wondered and worried about Sarah. He had spoken to the old cook as the flaming shell of the house fell in on itself. She said the girl had left home suddenly and without any explanation being offered by her parents. "There were – men – came around asking for her, asking questions." The old woman's eyes shifted constantly, never resting on Kurt's face for more than a fraction of a second before flicking away. She was afraid of the hard-eyed men who had come to the house but now enjoyed being the centre of attention. "And Herr Bauer had been saying some terrible things about the *Führer* and the Party. So I'd given in my notice and I'd finished tonight. He'd paid me. I was lucky there."

It was easy to get her to talk but she did not know what had happened to Sarah.

That night, a week after driving out of Warsaw, she and Hannah were at Poznan. They had meandered along the

border with East Prussia, that slow progress forced on them by the Polish roads, Hannah had not exaggerated their poor condition. It was while they were in Poznan that the news broke of the non-aggression pact signed by Russia and Germany.

They were sitting at a table outside their hotel and the Poles seated around them were hushed, listening to a radio broadcast. One of them murmured a translation from the Polish for Hannah, his voice hardly above a whisper as he listened, telling her of the pact. Sarah was abstracted, worried because the Bristol had still not telephoned with any word from Berlin. She saw the stricken expressions on the faces of the crowd and Hannah tight-lipped. Sarah asked, "Is that bad news?"

Hannah answered her, "I think Stalin has just put the noose around Poland's neck."

In the early hours of the 31st August Kurt Larsen, like all the others aboard *Brandenburg* and *Graf Spee*, knew that noose was about to be snapped tight. The two ships now cruised in mid-Atlantic, well clear of shipping lanes, only waiting for the order from OKM to begin the hunt and the slaughter. Hitler had determined on war, set the day and the time and they knew it.

Larsen stood alone on the upper deck of *Brandenburg* in the first paling of the dawn and wondered what lay ahead for him and the others in her crew. Death or glory? The first was possible but the second? There was no glory in commerce raiding and that was to be the task of these two tigers of the sea. But sinking the enemy's merchant fleet cut off his supplies, spread his defences thinly as they searched for raiders, demoralised his people. Commerce raiding was a good tactic and this was war.

Kurt faced it sombrely.

Able Seaman Robert Hurst woke in the first grey light to a hammering at the door of the hotel room in Rio de Janeiro. It took him a second to realise he was not in his hammock aboard *Ajax* and recall the events of the previous night: meeting Maria again and taking her out on the town,

blowing the pay saved over weeks spent at sea. Then the hotel room and the bed, her mouth on his and her body writhing under him . . .

She was beside him in the bed now, naked and clinging to him, frightened at being shocked from sleep. A voice bawled outside and the hammering went on, the door shaking. Hurst sat up, ran a hand through his hair and said, voice thick with sleep, "What the hell's going on?"

Maria said, "It is my husband."

Hurst was awake now. He grabbed her hands to examine them again – he had held them last night – but they were still innocent of rings on the finger that counted. The sheet was crumpled around her waist and he looked at her pointing breasts and wanted her again. But he said, "You never mentioned a husband. Not when we put into Rio before, and not last night."

The girl shrugged, recovering her poise. This was nothing new to her. "He goes away to Santos on business for days and leaves me alone." She pouted, then the voice bellowed outside again and she said, "But he has come back early. That is Jésus, my husband."

"Jesus! You're right there!" The door shook in its frame and Hurst leapt out of the bed and shoved it across the floor until it was jammed against the door. He looked for his clothes, swept them up from the chair where they lay and dragged on his trousers. He picked up his cap with its ribbon lettered 'HMS *Ajax*' and jammed it on his head. The rest he rolled into a bundle inside his jumper and tucked it under his arm.

He drew the curtains, looked out of the window and saw there was no fire escape, only a rainwater pipe running down the wall a yard away. It looked solidly fixed but if it wasn't . . . He peered down at the drop below, four storeys to fall and a paved yard at the bottom. He shrugged and accepted the risk, as the door burst free of the lock and grated open an inch or so before the weight of the bed halted it. Maria screamed as the face of Jesus showed in the narrow gap, dark and twisted with rage and jealousy. Then it crumpled as he stared at the bare-breasted girl in the bed, drew back from the door, disappeared.

Maria saw she was safe and leaned back on her elbows, relaxed. She called softly to Hurst, "He will weep and shout but then I will make it up with him. Next time your ship comes I will be in the Liverpool Bar."

He had first met her there, when *Ajax* had previously visited Rio. She spoke good English and said she worked for a British firm in Rio. She could not take him home because her parents were an old-fashioned pair and very strict. Hurst thought now that she had told him all kinds of tales while all the time there was Jesus. And this was not the first time, he was not the first; she was smiling at him now. Tomorrow or maybe tonight, just as soon as Jesus the meal ticket had gone to Santos, she would be back in the Liverpool Bar.

Hurst was not afraid of Jesus but had no wish to face his misery. He said, "To hell with you." He tied the bundle of clothes around his neck by the sleeves of his jumper and swung out of the window. The pipe took his weight except for the last length that pulled clear of the wall. He fell ten feet but landed crouching. Quickly he dressed and walked away.

He found a boat from *Ajax* at the quayside, ferrying off libertymen returning to the ship. The cox'n told him, "You're bloody lucky. We're the last boat and we're just off."

"We're not sailing till tomorrow."

"That's what you think. The old man has changed his mind. We're sailing now."

Hurst thought that he owed Jésus for that. Left to his own devices he would not have returned to the ship until his leave was done and she would have sailed and left him adrift in a strange port.

Then when *Ajax* was at sea 'Clear lower deck' was piped through the ship. The ship's company gathered on the upper deck and the 'old man', Captain Woodhouse, stood on a capstan and addressed them. As always, he rocked back and forward on his heels as he told them that a warning telegram had been received from Admiralty and war was imminent.

It came as a bolt from the blue. Few of them took any interest in world politics and the worsening position in Europe had passed them by. They were working hard.

playing hard and enjoying it. They had grown accustomed to the round of a port, girls, beer and transgressions followed by punishment and a few weeks at sea, then another port and more girls, beer . . . In their hearts they had known that it would end some time. But in a *war*!

As they fell out and went below someone said sadly, "That could ha' been our last run ashore for a bit."

Hurst thought, Or our last run ashore. Finish.

He had never been at war before.

Hannah drove the Ford out of Katowice that morning with the top down, the girl at her side. As they walked from their hotel to the car Sarah glanced at Hannah, dressed in cotton trousers and shirt, old tennis shoes – yet still seeming stylish. Sarah envied her easy grace and was glad the older woman was there to turn to.

When they were out on the road and headed for the border Sarah asked, "Are we going into Germany?" She kept her tone deliberately casual, though she knew that entering Germany could lead to her arrest – and worse. But she had not told Hannah about her flight from Berlin and the reason for it.

Hannah shook her head, "I should think the border is closed, or very few people are being allowed to cross, the international situation being as it is." But Hannah knew that if the *Gestapo* had tried to kidnap her in Spain they would snap her up if they found her in Germany.

Sarah, relieved, now asked as one who doubted the possibility, "Do you think there might be war?"

"Might?" Hannah glanced sidewise at her. "I think it's a little stronger than that."

Sarah shrugged, "But we've had these crises before, first when Hitler marched into Austria and then when he invaded Czechoslovakia. There was talk of war both times but it came to nothing."

"You mean the politicians backed down."

Sarah's temper showed as she burst out angrily, "They've no bloody *guts*! The end is always the same. Hitler gets what he wants and everybody accepts it. Him and his bully boys trample over people but nobody does anything!"

Hannah was startled by the girl's anger, and asked, "What would you do?"

"I've – " Sarah stopped there. She had almost blurted out her activities in the organisation but then remembered again that some or all of her friends would still be at risk – if they had not already been rounded up. So she only said, "I'd fight."

Hannah saw Sarah's determination and warned, "War is awful. It brutalises people, drives them into holes in the ground, tears them apart." She knew She went on slowly, "I think this time might be different I think the Poles will fight. Your country and France are pledged to support her " But she saw Sarah was not convinced, and sat staring ahead, her mouth pressed into a thin line.

At the border they slowed for the frontier posts but the barriers were raised and the sentries on the Polish side waved them on Hannah waved back and said, "May as well have a closer look. We can turn around halfway over." But then as she drove across the short stretch of no-man's-land she saw the German sentries laconically imitating the Poles. And she thought that this might be her last chance to peep into Germany, even this remote part, before war came. Because she thought it would come, and soon. She grinned at Sarah and said, "Looks like it's open house. Let's take them up on it " Sarah opened her mouth to call a protest, an appeal, but she was too late The Ford slid past the raised barrier and they were in Germany.

They drove on in silence, Hannah uneasy now, instinct warning her that all was not right, Sarah apprehensive So for a minute or more the road curled through forest but then Sarah called, "Slow down! See that?"

She raised her hand but Hannah, in the act of changing down, snapped, "*Don't point!*" And then went on, "I see them now." Her attention had been fixed on the winding road and she had not been able to peer into the green shaded gloom under the trees on either side. Sarah had, and seen the trucks and tanks spaced out, each under its earth- and green-tinted camouflage net. And under each net sprawled the crew of the tank or truck; she could see them move and the pale blink of their faces as they turned to stare out at the

road and the cruising Ford.

Sarah said, "There are hundreds of them!"

Hannah nodded; they were driving slowly past an army hidden in bivouac. On and on. The forest was full of the high trucks and the squat tanks in their drab war-paint. Until they came to a side road and Hannah turned into it, braked the Ford but kept its engine running. She said, "Now let's see if we can get away with it."

Sarah glanced at her quickly, "What do you mean?"

"They let us in." Hannah engaged reverse and swung back onto the main road but now the bonnet of the Ford pointed the way they had come. "But will they let us out? Because I think we've seen more than we should."

She let out the clutch so the car rolled forward and then changed up until she was in top gear, but held the speed down to a steady fifty kilometres per hour.

Sarah asked, "Can't we go faster?" She wanted to be safe across the border as soon as possible.

But Hannah refused, "If we look to be running they'll stop us. You can't drive faster than a bullet."

Sarah remembered the German frontier guards with their rifles slung over their shoulders.

The soldiers hidden in the forest under the camouflage nets watched them pass as they had done before and made no move to stop them. The road wound on interminably but finally straightened to run down to the border. The barrier was still raised on the German side but Hannah saw one of the two sentries glance back along the road towards them and then lounge over to the barrier. To lower it?

Hannah's foot twitched on the accelerator and she warned quietly, "Hold on. If he starts to lower it then I put my foot on the gas and we go through. Keep your head down."

They rolled down to the border, still at that steady 50 kph, and the sentry at the barrier made some adjustment then turned from it. He and the other soldier faced the Ford. Their big steel helmets with the visors hid their eyes in deep shadow from the glare of the sun overhead. Hannah changed down to trundle past the barrier and one of the sentries lifted his hand. For a moment she thought he would hold out the flat of it for her to stop. She was ready to go, to

hunch down from the shots that would follow. Then he flapped the hand lazily, gesturing to her to go on. She drove past him and on over the bridge, back into Poland.

Sarah let out her pent breath in a sigh. She glanced across at Hannah, still driving steadily, composed. Sarah said, "All in the day's work for you, I suppose."

Hannah grinned but shook her head, "I'd like to act blase but that scared me. To tell you the truth, they don't like me over there and I've been warned to keep out, for my health."

Sarah was tempted then to tell of her own fears, but hesitated, remembered that this woman was now something more than an acquaintance but not yet a friend.

At Katowice Hannah informed the Poles of what she had seen across the border in Germany but the officers at headquarters there only nodded and shrugged. They knew already.

Their rooms in the hotel were side by side. The distant rumbling woke Sarah in the darkness before the first dawn light and she saw the flashes against the night sky. At first she thought it was a storm but then realised this was like no storm she had ever seen. She had drawn back the curtains from her window before settling down to sleep. Now she threw aside the covers and ran to it. She peered out at the flickering curtain of red, orange and yellow light that shimmered along the western horizon. She knew the border lay that way but –

There came a rapid knocking at her door, then it opened and Hannah, wrapped in a robe, joined her at the window. Sarah asked, "What is it?" She suspected the truth but was reluctant to believe it, wanted to be told she was wrong.

Hannah swallowed and then said sadly, "I think it's the start of the war. That's gunfire."

Sarah stared at the man made Northern Lights painting the sky, listened to the factory-produced thunder, and said, "Are you sure?"

"Certain. I saw it in Spain." And there was the reason for that sadness. She had seen it before.

But this war was not like Spain. This was faster. Hannah hunted for copy and Sarah went with her, both running for

cover when the bombing started, then crawling out cautiously afterwards. But just before noon of the next day Hannah spent some time telephoning her stories of that morning and talking to her contacts in Warsaw. Then she made another call, listened briefly then lowered the telephone to yell across the hall of the hotel to Sarah, "Grab our bags and throw them in the car!" Sarah did, and slid in behind the wheel as Hannah ran down the steps from the front door and jumped into the Ford, vaulting over the closed door into her seat. She panted, "I paid the bill and phoned that last copy through. Drive like hell, honey. Right now the army is pulling out of this place because it's about to be surrounded. And the word I get from Warsaw is that the whole front is collapsing!"

They drove to Czestochowa. The road was bad, crowded and they were bombed twice. They did not reach Czestochowa till late afternoon and then they found the main street full of troops on the march. They were heading eastward, away from the firing. Hannah questioned several officers before she found one who spoke English. He sat in an open touring car at a cross-roads, consulting a map spread on his knee while his driver wolfed a chunk of bread. He told Hannah, "The garrison is leaving – a withdrawal - because the Germans are using motorised columns. They are moving quickly, outflanking our lines. They are almost around Czestochowa."

The two women drove on, slowly overtaking the long, long columns of trudging men with their huge packs and slung rifles. The soldiers moved in a cloud of dust kicked up by the tramping boots and ran with sweat from the baking heat of the sun. Hannah and Sarah took an hour or more to pass them and the open-topped Ford became overlaid with dust, their hands and faces gritty with it. They looked out on the hurrying soldiers with unease. This was a withdrawal? Or a retreat? Hannah said, "That's an entire division on the march, five thousand men or more."

They made better speed as they left the marching infantry behind and halted only as darkness fell. They pulled off the road and prepared to eat what food they had and then to sleep in the car and go on at first light. As they ate they

watched the false dawn of the gunfire on the horizon and listened to its grumbling. It did not sound far away.

They had barely finished their scratch meal of meat, hard bread and rough wine drunk from the bottle when another car pulled up on the road. It was an open tourer and a figure got down from the passenger seat alongside the driver and crossed to them. Hannah shone her torch on him and they saw it was the officer they had talked with in Czestochowa. She switched off the torch with an apology, but not before they had seen that the young officer's face was haggard.

He said, "I thought I recognised your car. You must not stay here."

Hannah answered, "We'll be moving on as soon as it's light."

The officer shook his head. It seemed to twitch as with some nervous palsy. He said, "No. Rest for a little, maybe one hour, but then go on." He looked back down the road. The engine of his tourer was still running, the driver at the wheel.

Hannah asked quietly, "What is the matter?"

"You saw the garrison of Czestochowa, passed them on the road. When I left them two hours ago it was because they were encircled. The German tanks, armoured cars and motorised infantry had swung around them. I was in a car and we drove out of the trap just as it was closing. No one will get out on foot." He rubbed at his face with his hands, then lowered them to stare at the two women. "The Germans are moving quickly, faster than I could ever believe. Rest a little, then go and drive at top speed." He saluted, then went back to his car, climbed in and it pulled away, was lost in the darkness.

Sarah said quietly, "All those men. You said five thousand. Wiped out or captured like that."

Hannah nodded. She had heard the Germans were advancing quickly and now she had proof at first hand.

This was far faster than the struggle in Spain.

This was *Blitzkrieg*.

On the next day, Sunday, they booked in again at the Hotel Bristol in Warsaw. There were plenty of vacant rooms; people were already leaving the city because of the

news of the German advance. An excited waiter told them of the British and French declarations of war and they heard the crowds cheering in the streets.

Sarah said flatly, "They're celebrating a bit early."

Hannah cocked an eye at her, "What do you mean?"

"Britain and France can't get into the Baltic so how can they help Poland?"

"By attacking Germany?"

Sarah said sceptically, "Do you think they will?"

Hannah recalled the British and French politicians and soldiers she had interviewed or listened to in the last few years, and answered, "No." She grinned wryly at Sarah, thinking that the girl had courage and a mind of her own. She was no fool.

They slipped back into something like their old routine, despite the city being bombed several times each day. Hannah moved from the Press Section in Pilsudski Square to the embassies, the typewriter and the telephone. Only now Sarah went with her and hammered away at the typewriter while Hannah prowled the room with a cup of coffee or a Martini and dictated her copy. Then the telephones refused to take any further international calls and Hannah's dispatches had to be sent over a radio link that was subject to delays of up to thirty-six hours. The two women swore in unison. They were becoming a team now, sharing a joke as they had shared the hardships.

Hannah said, "This damn war is catching up with us again." It caught up with them next day.

The bombing that morning was the worst so far. The *Luftwaffe* attacked the motor factory by the airport, an aeroplane factory and the Fiat automobile plant in Praga on the other side of the river. They also smashed to rubble or set alight several blocks of tenements by the railway station. Hannah and Sarah went down to see.

There were no taxis for hire and Hannah said she wanted to save the Ford with its full tank and spare cans of petrol locked in the boot. So in cotton shirts and trousers they walked down the streets littered with débris, headed for the columns of smoke and flame lifting above the roofs between. They were becoming used to the air raids and sauntered

along in the sunlight looking about them. They saw this was a poor area of the city with a stables smelling of manure, some small, cheap shops and drab blocks of tenements.

But then they heard a different sound above the drone of the high flying Dorniers and Heinkels and ran when the whistle of the bombs became a scream as they neared the ground. Hannah broke right and Sarah scurried to the left, both seeking shelter in the doorways of the first tenements they came to, throwing themselves face down with their arms around their heads in the way that had become a reflex action these last few days.

The screams ended in *crumps* as the stick of bombs burst along and across the street. Hannah felt the ground heave under her and the hot breath of blast tug at her hair. The explosions made her ears ring. When she cautiously lifted her head she saw dust boiling into the street from the tenement opposite that had taken a hit on the roof and collapsed. Hannah pushed up to her feet and ran in search of Sarah.

They were both lucky, Sarah to be alive and Hannah to find her. The front of the building had fallen out into the street and the wreckage of masonry, bricks and broken beams stretched half across it. Hannah clambered up and over the pile until she stood where she judged the hallway to have been. Sarah could have gone no further.

Other people were appearing through the dust clouds, with vague ideas of rescue but little else. Warsaw had not been prepared for this aerial war, did not yet know how to cope with it. Hannah had taken the course in Spain. She shouted, "*Sarah!*" Then listened, shouted again and again and stumbled about on the bricks and splintered beams, searching. She prayed for an answering voice but only heard it by chance. Her ears still rang, bombs shrieked and burst further away in the city, the anti aircraft guns hammered. But then, for a second, the bombs and the guns ceased, as if to draw breath before going on. And in that moment of stillness Hannah heard the thin, faint call from below her: "*Help!*"

Hannah thought she saw where the call came from. The twin front doors of the tenement that had stood open, flat

back against the walls of the hall inside, had been blown out together. They made a roof, holding up the rubble, fashioning a tunnel beneath. She knelt at its mouth and called again but now the guns were firing again and she heard nothing come from the tunnel. She was still certain the cry had come from there.

She crawled into it. After the first yard the roof was less than a foot above the heaped bricks and rough-edged masonry so she had to wriggle along on her stomach. It became pitch black as she left the daylight behind and her own body blocked it out. The atmosphere in the tunnel was thick with dust that set her coughing as she breathed it. She groped ahead of her with outstretched arms before she pulled herself forward another foot or so. And now when she called Sarah's name she got an answer from the black void in front of her face: "Hannah? Is that you?"

"Nobody else! Hold on!"

Then her reaching hands found the girl's head, fumbled in her hair and down the sides of her face to her shoulders. Sarah also lay face-down, hands clasped over her head. Now those hands unclasped and instead seized hold on Hannah's arms. It was a tight grip and Hannah thought this girl had a strong hold on life and would not give up.

Sarah was jammed in the narrow tunnel and could not free herself but Hannah tugged at the girl's shoulders while Sarah heaved her slim body forward. She moved, scraped forward with a rattling of falling stones behind her as her legs kicked their way out, winced with pain as the skin was stripped from her by the embracing masonry. But as Hannah worked backwards out of the tunnel so Sarah was dragged after her. Until there was light around them, Hannah got to her knees and lifted Sarah to hers. Both of them rubbed at dust-inflamed eyes and coughed.

They saw that there were dozens of men, and women, now working at clearing the rubble from the road, digging for survivors and forming bucket chains to fight fires. Others were on the move, whole families trailing away along the street carrying bulging cardboard suitcases, bedding, clocks, kettles. Hannah knew she was seeing the start of refugees here.

The bombing and the gunfire had stopped. Hannah said, "We'd better get you back to the Bristol." She climbed to her feet and held out her hand to Sarah. They picked their way down off the heaped debris on legs that were shaking now and set off up the street.

Sarah did not say 'Thank you'. Instead she said, "I had to get out of Germany in a hurry . . ." She told of her involvement with the organisation smuggling victims of the Nazis out of Germany, her stepfather's determination to speak out against the regime, the demands and threats of his black-uniformed cousin, Werner. Hannah told Sarah about her attempted kidnapping in Spain and Smith's rescue. "So they're after both of us. And I told you your father was quite a guy!" They arrived at the Bristol with their arms around each other.

Later, bathed and changed, Hannah tapped at Sarah's door and called, "I'm on my way down to the bar."

"I'll be there in ten minutes." Sarah stood in front of the bathroom mirror, sticking lint and plaster on the skinned parts of her body.

"Right!"

But Hannah returned in less than five minutes to bang on the door. "Sarah? I've just been talking to some guys downstairs." Sarah knew the 'guys' were other correspondents. Hannah went on, "They tell me the American Embassy is evacuating and the Polish government has already gone. All the guys are taking off! Throw on your clothes and grab a bag. We're getting out of here!"

When the Stukas caught them they were outside the city. Sarah was driving, working her way through the long column of refugees on farm carts, bicycles, or on foot, pushing perambulators or barrows. All were seen dimly through the cloud of dust that covered the column, stretching for miles across the plain burning dry under the sun.

The figures around the open Ford suddenly scattered, running like startled chickens in a farmyard, meandering back and forth across the road. Hannah craned her head around to look back along the column. She saw the aircraft with its oddly bent wings swooping down on them like a hawk and the other four – five – hanging in formation above

it, waiting their turn. She remembered that silhouette from Spain and shouted, "Divebombers! Get off the road! We're going to be *strafed*!"

Sarah yanked on the wheel and sent the Ford bouncing over the verge and into the brown field beyond. Hannah saw the first Stuka plummeting towards the earth, towards her, and yelled, "We've got to get out and get down!"

And Sarah shrieked back at her, "What if we leave the car and he hits it?" The car was their lifeline. Hannah hung on to its door as Sarah flattened her foot to the floor and the Ford picked up speed, rocking, swerving and bouncing over the rutted surface.

The first Stuka pulled out of its dive, its splayed wheels seeming to sweep just over their heads, and its bomb screamed down to burst some fifty yards away with a jet of flame, huge splash of dust like a brick thrown into a pond, and a drifting plume of smoke. Then came the second Stuka, the third . . .

Sarah threw the Ford about at breakneck speed, swinging in tight circles or weaving in figures of eight, as the fat steel cartons of death wobbled from the Stukas then, as the tail-fins of the bombs gave them direction, slid down their curved paths to burst around the car.

The Ford was creating its own dust-cloud, churned up from the dry earth by the tearing wheels and mixing with the hanging dust thrown up by the bombs and the drifting smoke from their bursts. The smoke stank of the explosive and the two women coughed smoke and dust from their lungs and rubbed them from red eyes. Sarah with one hand as she steered the Ford. Then they were out of it and in the open again. The Stukas had gone and the dust and smoke were settling or drifting away on the breeze.

Sarah drove more sedately to the side of the road, braked and switched off. They sat wiping at their faces, cleaning off the worst of the skin of mud formed by sweat and dust. Their eyes searched the sky nervously for more aircraft but saw none. Sarah said, "From now on, whoever isn't driving will have to keep a look-out for planes."

"Uh-*uh*!" Hannah agreed, "I should have thought of that. I'd seen them before."

They were both breathing deeply, as if they had run a long way. Sarah got down from the car and walked around it. "She seems all right." She climbed back into her seat and started the engine: "And she goes."

She turned the Ford out onto the road and began working through the river of refugee traffic again. Then Hannah said, "Someone else isn't so lucky."

Ahead of them a car was stopped at the roadside, its bonnet lifted and steam trickling up from around it. A man dragged a suitcase out of the back and slammed the door disgustedly. He turned as the Ford crept past him, stared and said, "Hannah?"

She told Sarah, "Pull in!" Then Hannah turned in her seat as the Ford came to rest at the side of the road and the man walked up to them. He was in his forties, long and thin in a baggy suit that hung on him, peering out from under a battered, snap-brim trilby hat. He took it off to show sandy hair, grinned at Hannah and she said, "Hi, Jim. What's the trouble?"

He answered disgustedly, "Bomb splinters've torn the radiator and fuel system to hell. That automobile is going nowhere."

He shook Hannah's hand then she introduced Sarah. "This is Jim Rice, a fellow American and we're in the same line of business. Jim, meet Sarah Smith. She's British and a great girl. So what are you doing, Jim?"

"Trying to get out of Poland." Then he added drily, "After going to a hell of a lot of trouble to get in. I was covering the German side in Berlin up to a week ago. They told me the German-Polish border was shut so I came through Denmark and Sweden just as the shooting started. This morning I got some straight answers, but clear off the record, from a major on the Staff. The Polish air force has been wiped out and the German army is running rings around their troops. Never mind what the government says, the war is all over bar the shouting."

Hannah said, "Oh, God!" Poland was a democracy and the Poles were going the way of the Czechs. "Who said the good guys always win?" But she felt Sarah's eyes on her and asked, "Berlin? Any trouble with mail getting through

there, Jim?"

"Not me."

"Sarah here, she cabled her folks five, maybe six times, but didn't get an answer."

"Is that so? Smith, uh? Attached to your embassy?"

Sarah said, "No. I cabled my stepfather, Ulrich Bauer. He's German."

"Bauer?" And then Rice asked, "Businessman? Lived in the Wannsee district? English wife?"

Sarah smiled, "That's right." She had not noticed his use of the past tense.

Hannah had. "You knew them, Jim?"

He studied the hat he held, smoothing the brim. "Only heard about him, in the way of business. He made himself pretty unpopular by saying some hard things about Hitler and his gang. Then about a week before I left there was an accident. I didn't cover the story but I heard about it from a local man who did." He stopped there.

Sarah had caught that momentary hesitation and asked harshly, "What kind of 'accident'?"

"The house burned down." He looked up at Sarah and she was aware of Hannah's hand on her arm, the people shuffling past through the dust, the sun that burnt her face. Rice said, "Sorry. This guy, he told me when we'd had a couple of drinks. He was feeling pretty bad about it because it seemed he knew Mr Bauer. He said gasoline was used. He didn't print that, of course."

"What about my stepfather, my mother?"

Rice, gentle man, could only offer her bitter consolation: "He was sure they were dead before the fire started."

Sarah did not weep. Crying would come later and all the worse for that, Hannah knew as she watched her, thinking that now the girl had to find her father. She said gently, "C'mon kid, move over and let me drive and we'll get this show on the road again."

Sarah shook her head, "I can drive." Her voice was quiet, even, without hysteria.

Hannah hesitated, then nodded, "OK. Jim, you throw your case in the back and climb in after it."

He did, and asked, "Where are you headed?"

Hannah said, "We started out to follow the government, but now they're finished, right?" And when Rice nodded, she said, "So it's one heck of a haul but we'll go home through Romania."

Sarah let in the clutch. They had a suitcase each but what really mattered were the big cans of petrol in the boot, the bread and wine in the back seat and the pistol in the glove compartment.

So Sarah set out in search of her father.

When Smith returned to London from Germany it was only for one night before going off on another assignment. His country was at war now. He found a handful of mail scattered on the carpet inside the door of his flat. He sifted through it quickly, hoping there might be one from his daughter, Sarah, or giving news of her, but was disappointed. They were bills save for one envelope addressed in a writing that was vaguely familiar, the copperplate upright and bold. He opened it and glanced first at the signature and closing sentence: "Best wishes to yourself and Mrs Smith . . ."

It was from Buckley, who had served with him as a leading seaman until Smith was carried ashore wounded from *Audacity* in 1918. Smith's lips twitched as memories came flooding back – of Buckley's ability to express disapproval of his captain without uttering a word or moving a muscle - and his disbelieving exasperation when Smith took some risk.

He read the letter through. Buckley was going back to the Navy and asked if he could serve with Smith again? Smith was touched by the request, that Buckley not only remembered him but was prepared to put his life in Smith's hands. It was an easy letter to answer and Smith wrote his reply at once. Buckley was large, solid, silent and competent, a good man to have at your side. Smith said he had to go abroad for a while but when he returned he would ask for the big leading hand. Then he added briefly that he had been divorced some years ago.

Next day he sailed for Denmark.

Jake Tyler listened to the news coming out of the stained

and scratched old wireless set with his eyes closed sleepily against the glare of the sun. He lay on the deck of the *Mary Ellen* that was tied up to the quay. The small port lay on the southern shore at the mouth of the Brazilian river that was itself some five hundred miles north of the estuary of the Rio de la Plata and his original destination of Montevideo. Beyond the quay and a line of low warehouses was the town with its streets, houses, stores and bars. A few men worked, slowly and sweating, on the quay but Jake had better things to do in the heat of the day.

His long body was burnt nearly black by the sun and he wore only a ragged pair of shorts. A finger of one hand rested gently on the taut-stretched fishing-line that bent over the bulwark of the *Mary Ellen* then curved down into the river. He waited for the jerk and thrum on the line that would tell him he had a bite.

The *Mary Ellen* was a motorised lighter built twenty years before to be used as a landing craft in another war, a long steel box with an engine at the stern. She was well found and cared for, even loved by her owner, Michael Garrity. She had rust but he fought it with the chipper and the wire brush so that she scarcely showed a speck of it. He never stopped painting her, when he finished at one end he started again at the other. He regularly had her hauled out on the slip to clean her bottom and her single diesel engine gleamed and ran like a Swiss watch.

She was his home and income in one. He had decked her over at the stern, built a wheelhouse on the deck and below it two cabins, a galley and a saloon with a table and leather-cushioned couches along each side. The accommodation was not luxurious but snug, tidy and shipshape with everything in its place, but it had never known a woman's touch. Garrity found his women ashore and left them there.

The rest of the lighter clear up to the bow was a hold. Garrity discharged cargoes from ships lying out in the river two or three times a month. He also ran the *Mary Ellen* as a ferry between the port and the small quarry town on the northern shore, ten miles away across the wide estuary. For a good half of each month he did nothing except tend the lighter and drink quietly in a bar in the town. It was a life

that suited him.

It also suited Jake Tyler. He had put the offer to Mike Garrity: "I'll work for my bed and my grub, I don't want pay." Garrity had taken him on. Jake could manage without pay because he had inherited £20,000 from his grandmother not long before. He had deposited it in a small Boston bank which sent him his interest as a cheque every month.

So now he was content to fish and do a little work for Mike Garrity in return for a bunk aboard the *Mary Ellen* and his keep. He reckoned his next cheque was due in another eight days. When it came it would last out the month as pocket money if used with care. Or he could blow it all in a week. That was a decision to be made but he would take his time over it. He stretched and relaxed.

He heard the newscasts, scattered in short snatches between jazz and swing bands playing in hotels and night clubs in Rio or Montevideo, but did not take them in. The *Blitzkrieg* in Poland, the declarations of war by France and Britain, did not concern him. He was a United States citizen and a neutral. Little concerned him. He had opted out until he had decided what to do with his life.

Then he sat up, frowning, puzzled. He saw Mike Garrity, short, scrawny and bandy-legged, walking along the quay towards the *Mary Ellen*. Behind him cruised a pick-up truck, rolling slowly at a walking pace to match that of Garrity. Three men were crowded into the front of the truck and Jake knew them all. The man at the wheel was Otto Bergmann, the other two were his cronies and all were leading lights in the local Nazi Bund. They were bawling out, "*Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles*!"

Mike Garrity was close now and Jake could see his face was red with rage. The little man stepped down from the quay onto the deck of the lighter and Jake asked, "What's going on?"

Garrity had grown up in the slums of London's East End. His nasal Cockney voice quivered with anger as he glowered at the men in the pick up, now halted opposite him on the quay. "They found me in Angie's bar. Told me Hitler'll run over England like he's doing with Poland. They said when that happens I'll have to lift me cap to them. They were

trying to rile me. So I came out and they followed me. Like you saw."

Jake said, "Well, you made the right move." All three in the pick up were big men barely into their thirties.

They had stopped singing now and Otto called, "You keep him safe on board, *Amerikaner*." And when Jake did not answer, Otto pressed, "You and Roosevelt might be next, when we've done with England."

"I'm neutral," Jake said mildly. "Maybe you ought to think about keeping it that way."

Otto laughed and boasted, "We'll keep it anyway we like. We run things around here." He smacked the pick-up into gear and drove away along the quay, all three men guffawing raucously.

Mike Garrity muttered, "Big talk, but mostly true. Him and his sort own most of the town. Hitler has this place sewn up as tight as Berlin." He spat over the side and started aft.

Jake called after him. "You haven't been out of this river for more than fifteen years and you swear you'll never go back to England. What made you so patriotic all of a sudden?"

Garrity turned his head and answered, "That's my business." Then he dropped down the hatch that led to the saloon and the two cabins.

Jake Tyler grinned and sprawled his six and a-half foot length on the deck once more, groped and found the line, closed his eyes and sighed contentedly. When his cheque arrived in eight days – or was it seven? Anyway . . .

On the other side of the Atlantic his mother said, "Well, maybe I'll find my boy has come home, that'll more than make up for going back early." She sat at her dressing-table in the stateroom. Her husband, William, wrestled with his collar stud and staggered as the liner rocked gently to the swell. Margaret went on, "But I wish we could have stayed for another month like we planned. France was fine, but we only had those two days in London." Then she looked around the stateroom, spacious and luxurious, and said for the tenth time since they boarded, "My, this is nice."

William grumbled, "It should be. It cost plenty. But, OK,

we could have used that month in London. Sure. Only now there's a European war. Suppose Hitler's airplanes bomb London like they did Warsaw?"

Margaret shuddered. "I guess you're right."

"I'm damn sure of it." He pulled on his shoes, black and polished until they shone, then tied the laces. He stood up to put his hands on his wife's shoulders and look into her reflection in the mirror. "I've told you, stop worrying about Jake. He'll come back in his own good time. And I'll tell you something else, when he does he can forget about the business. He can do what he likes because it's his life. I guess I was wrong and I leaned on him too much. Just, I sometimes wonder why I worked so hard, if he doesn't want it. That was the whole idea. I started with nothing but he'd have a successful operation to move into when he came out of college."

Margaret stood up and smiled at him. "Maybe he wants to make it on his own, like you did."

Her evening dress was not new but William liked it and thought her lovely. He grinned, "He'll make it, all right." He picked up his dinner jacket and shrugged into it, "C'mon, let's go and eat."

She took his arm and they went down to dinner in the restaurant of the *Athenia*.

The commander of the U-boat patrolling on the surface off the coast of Ireland stood at the front of the conning tower and swept the night horizon with his binoculars. He lowered the glasses and rested his eyes for a while, balancing himself wide-legged against the roll and pitch of the boat. He told the look-outs on either side of the conning tower, quietly, "Keep a sharp watch."

Only an hour before he had received the signal that Germany and Britain were at war.

7

"Montevideo – here we come!"

Smith could see his death in the car parked across the street. This was early in the evening of a dark day of mist and rain at the beginning of November and he had been in Denmark two months now. He peered from behind the shabby curtains of his drab hotel room at the street below. It glistened black under the rain, reflecting the yellow globes of the street lights, there was no black-out in neutral Denmark. She had stayed neutral in the last war and intended to remain so through this one. And who could blame her, living on Germany's doorstep?

He could see into the cafe directly opposite where the desk clerk at the hotel would soon go to eat as he did every evening at this time. That was routine. The bus stop was a dozen yards or so to the right of the cafe and a few people waited for the bus, standing in a shop doorway nearby. That was also routine. The closed, black car was pulled into the kerb a score of yards on the other side of the cafe. The men in the car would know the routines.

Smith glanced at his watch then pulled on his old trenchcoat, shoved the big Colt automatic in one pocket and picked up his hat. He locked the door of his room as he left it, ran down the stairs and left the key with the clerk, saw him tuck it into its numbered slot behind the desk. He pushed through the swing doors and then paused in their shelter while he buttoned the coat. He slid a hand into one pocket to grip the Colt but he did not think he would need it. They could see him from the car and its engine had not started. They would not risk a shooting in front of witnesses.

He saw the bus rolling down the street towards him and trotted across to the stop then climbed aboard after the others who hurried out from the shop doorway. The bus

pulled away and the car did not follow. If he stayed aboard the bus it would drop him outside Josef's bar in five minutes, but as it slowed and swung around the first corner he waited until he was out of sight of the car before jumping off.

He walked back to the little bar that stood on the corner and sat down at a table by the window. The bar was nearly full and most of the other tables were occupied. The place was noisy and smoky, but when Smith wiped condensation from the window with his sleeve he could see the car still waiting.

When the waiter came Smith ordered beer and sipped it, watching the street and the car. After a while the desk clerk came out of the hotel and ran across the street through the rain to the cafe. A minute or two later a rear door of the car opened and a man got out, pulling a suitcase after him. He carried the suitcase across to the hotel and disappeared inside. Ten minutes later he emerged without the suitcase and returned to the car. The engine started and it drove away.

Smith had told Carl he would be at Josef's that evening and arranged to meet him there. Josef's bar was a meeting place for the drivers of the trucks coming over the border from Germany and Carl was the Dane, fluent in German, running the network on the ground. He chatted with the drivers, bought the beer, quietly offered the bribes.

The Embassy had recommended Carl and Smith had recruited him. Smith was the paymaster and framed the demands for information. His main concern was Kiel and the Kiel Canal, what ships passed through it and when and whether they sailed from one end into the Baltic or from the other into the North Sea. The canal was only fifty miles on the other side of the border in Germany.

Correction. That had been his main concern. No longer. He stared out through the window at the slanting rain, pale blue eyes bleak and face hard. He recalled standing in the road in Berlin and watching the house burn. He had heard nothing of Sarah, his daughter, and did not know if she was alive or dead, hiding or in one of the camps like Mauthausen. That was the same as being dead.

He got up and went to the telephone on the wall at the end

of the bar. He called the cheap boarding-house where Carl had a room and told him, "I'm at Josef's. I came early. I had some papers for you but I left them on the table in my room. Will you pick them up on your way down? It's on your way. If the desk clerk is there, tell him I sent you, but I think he'll be eating. Just take my key and go up."

He went back to his seat and to watching. He wondered if they had told Carl and was ready to bet they had not, in case he gave it away by a nervous word, a glance or a tone of voice. Carl had sounded normal on the telephone.

And after ten minutes, there he was. He wore a raincoat and rubber boots, held up an umbrella as he bustled along the opposite pavement. He was a big, jolly man who always hid behind a wide smile. He ran up the steps and pushed through the swing doors into the hotel.

There was nothing in the room that Smith wanted. He had detected the three men in the car following him over a week ago and he had followed them. They always went back to a house rented by a member of the German Consulate. They were ostensibly German businessmen as he was ostensibly working for a British firm. Then he had trailed Carl back to the house, and later saw him pay a wad of cash into a bank account. How much had they paid him for Smith's life?

The window of the hotel room bulged out then burst in a sheet of flame and a spout of smoke. Glass, rubble and torn curtains were vomited across the street and the inside of the room was an inferno. The glass of the window in the bar shook in its frame but did not break. Smith's ears rang from the explosion. He allowed himself to be carried out into the street with the rest of the crowd in the bar as they spilled onto the pavement, gaping, shouting, questioning. Then after a minute he rounded the corner and walked away.

He was finished here because the Germans knew him so the men in London would have to send someone else. He was also finished with Intelligence work because they had promised him this would be the last assignment. He walked away through the rain, stepping lightly as if a load had been lifted from his shoulders.

Veronique Duclos was now a Doctor of Medicine, respected

for her work with the victims of the tram crash. She still wore the staid clothing and big spectacles she had adopted to gain credibility as a medical student. For too many years she had lived solely for her career, worked and studied to the point of exhaustion. She could not change overnight, but she was looking about her with a light in her eye.

She was going to join her parents in Montevideo for a long vacation over Christmas and into the New Year. There were berths on the liner *Formose* sailing from Le Havre on 11 November but she found a British ship was bound for Montevideo, sailing earlier, arriving earlier and decidedly cheaper. Veronique, newly qualified, was living on a shoestring. So she booked her passage on the SS *Whitby*.

Smith joined the *Whitby* at Southampton a week after leaving Denmark and just before she sailed. She was a tramp steamer bound for South America with a general cargo, and he was one of her few passengers.

He had not been given a command. The two senior officers who interviewed him at Admiralty said they had decided that a shore appointment would give him a chance to recover from the stress under which he had worked for years. They were honest men and could not meet his eyes, showed their embarrassment.

Earlier they had talked of him. "He was promised a command."

The other had shaken his head, reluctantly but firmly. "God knows we are in his debt and we must try to repay him in some part. But not with a command. He was always unorthodox and made enemies, still has them. And he's been too long out of the Service. So not a command. Not yet."

Smith had not believed them and was bitter. He was sure they had been quick to grant his request for Buckley only as a sop to him, some sort of consolation.

That it was. When the big leading seaman tapped on the open door of the cabin Smith grinned a welcome, shook Buckley's hand then pulled him into the cabin and sat him down on the only chair. Buckley perched on it uncomfortably while Smith leaned against the bulkhead, still grinning. Buckley's presence brought back memories of happier

times, though God knew they had shared hard ones as well. He lightened the gloom. Before joining *Whitby* Smith had brooded over his failure to get a ship and worried about his daughter, Sarah.

Smith said, "It's good to see you again. Sorry we've only got a shore appointment and not a ship. I hope you're not disappointed. And what have you been doing since I last saw you?" He thought Buckley looked fit, may have put on some weight but it was around his shoulders, not on his belly.

Buckley answered, "Afloat or ashore, doesn't matter to me, sir. And this draft could ha' been worse. As for what I've been doing. Well . . . " He was not happy at this meeting and wished it was over. He thought Smith was unchanged, still restless and with that cold stare that could turn into a quick smile. A good man to lead you but the Lord help you if you got on the wrong side of him. So Buckley did not beat about the bush in case he lost the courage to start – and this had to be done.

He said, "Not long after I left the Navy – 1919 that was – I got a letter from a lady. She said she wanted to see me and sent the fare for me and my wife so we went down to London on the train. She was in a hospital there. Said she had a little lad, just one year old he was, and she wanted us to take him on, bring him up. Because the doctors said she didn't have long, and they were right.

"We took him back up north with us. She'd left a pot o' money in trust for him, so the income would pay for his schooling and the capital would give him a start in life when he came of age. But the solicitor that had the handling of it lost the lot inside o' two years, so we brought him up like one of our own.

"She'd said the boy's father didn't know about him and she didn't want him to know because he was married with a family. She didn't want that spoiled. And when the boy was old enough we were to tell him his father had been lost at sea. And that's what we did."

Buckley stuck there. Smith had straightened from lounging on the bulkhead, stood with a hand to his head. But it was he who broke the silence, demanding harshly, "Well?"

That started Buckley again. "But then you said you

weren't married and there was the war and that changed everything. I reckoned I didn't have to keep my mouth shut any more, like I'd promised, and that you should both know the truth. The boy's name is Robert Hurst. His birth certificate shows his mother named the father as David Smith, seaman."

Smith thought: Eleanor Hurst. They had been lovers, a brief *affaire* that had ended, or so he had thought, when he was sent to the Mediterranean to take command of *Dauntless*. He had a son. That was hard to take in. He became aware of Buckley unhappily turning his cap around and around in his big hands. In 1917 Eleanor had known Buckley as Smith's right-hand man, learned his solid worth. So she entrusted her child to him. Smith asked, "What kind of – " he was about to say 'boy' but remembered: " – man is he?"

Buckley answered, "I'm proud of him."

Smith nodded slowly, "I'll bet he's proud of you, too." Then he asked, "Where is he? Does he know now?"

"I wrote to him. He's in *Ajax*, off the coast of South America. There's a chance you could meet him."

Whitby's engines began slowly turning as she eased away from the quayside, bound for Montevideo.

When the mail was distributed aboard the cruiser *Ajax* Robert Hurst collected his letter and opened it with a smile. He recognised that stiff copperplate hand But after reading the first paragraph he climbed from the crowded mess to the deck and found a secluded place aft of the funnel and just forward of the aircraft on its catapult. There, for a few minutes, he could escape from watching eyes, talk, his fellow men. It was a place to hide where his hurt would not show.

He unfolded the letter again, no longer smiling. He read it through from its opening sentence: "I have to tell you I have lied to you all these years . . . " Then he stared at the paper blankly as its message sank in. He realised he had lost the only father he had ever known. Buckley had been provider, dispenser of justice, confidant, friend Loved. Now he had a new one, a stranger and a captain in the Royal Navy, virtually a being from another planet. One of the gods he

saw high above him on the bridge. The embodiment of his ambition, for that it had been: to become a naval captain. 'Had been' because now he felt revulsion. This captain had left his mother to give birth and then die.

He crumpled the letter in his fist and threw it across the deck, but at once he ran after it, snatched it up and smoothed out the creased sheets.

Donovan, striding by, called, "What's up, Professor? Has she found another feller back home?" He said it with good humour and some sympathy because that kind of letter arrived when men were overseas for years. And the men themselves were no angels That was life.

But Hurst tucked the letter away in his jumper, said flatly, "Go to hell." And walked away.

Donovan stared after him, good humour evaporated. He was running out of patience with Hurst.

Hannah Fitzsimmons staggered and clutched at the rail as the cross-Channel packet pitched and rolled. But she shook her head so her hair flew out on the wind and turned her face into the salt spray. Sarah clung on beside her and they laughed together. The white cliffs of England were a blurred, low grey wall standing out of the sea. Hannah said, "With luck you'll see him soon."

Sarah nodded, "I'm looking forward to that – but I'm nervous. I've never met him." She could talk about her father now; she and Hannah had been through so much together, the flight from Poland and then the slow journey through Romania and across Europe.

Early in those travels Sarah had said, "I don't know where he'll be Mother once mentioned a house in Norfolk but I don't know just where."

Hannah had replied, "You could try his flat. He has one in London " Sarah had remained silent but her face spoke for her and Hannah said drily, "Don't look at me like that, darling, I only know the address."

Sarah had turned red and muttered, "Sorry."

But Hannah thought now that Sarah might still suspect her of being a designing female and in pursuit of Smith. Which was totally untrue?

When the packet docked they took the train to London, travelling third class at Sarah's insistence; her money was running low. But Hannah booked them both in at the Ritz. "After the last few weeks I deserve this pampering. You can pay me later. Besides, you might only be here for one night." Then she called a cab and gave the address of Smith's flat.

It was empty. A neighbour, in the black jacket and striped trousers of the civil servant and returning from his office, told them, "I heard it was being let but there have been no takers. People are moving out of London because of the bombing."

Out in the street again Hannah said, "Don't worry. We'll try the Admiralty. They'll know where he is."

Next day they drove to the Admiralty where Sarah proved her identity with her passport and birth certificate. She was told that Captain Smith had sailed for Montevideo only the day before and, "He may be there for some time, possibly years. You could write to him at the office of the Naval Attaché."

No. She had said she would speak to him face to face and that had not changed. She wanted to meet him now, needed him now. She only prayed he would want her. Sarah shook her head.

They were silent in the cab going back to the Ritz, both thinking. And when they arrived at the hotel Hannah held onto the cab and told Sarah, "You grab a cup of coffee, honey. I have to see a man about work and my next assign ment."

She drove off in the cab but Sarah did not go for coffee. Her quibbling over travelling first class had not been a mean streak surfacing, her funds were not just low but almost gone. Her flight across Europe had left her shabby but there was no money for new clothes. Poverty did not frighten her because she had never been poor and was confident she could earn her living. But that was not enough.

Her hand unconsciously went to her throat and she fingered the plain cord she wore like a necklace. She had brought little jewellery out of Germany but it was valuable. She had not worn it since the early days in Poland because

display would have been an invitation to thieves. There were five rings in a little soft, silken bag hanging between her breasts.

Sarah walked across to the desk and asked the clerk there, "Can you tell me how to get to Hatton Garden and Montevideo, please?"

He did not blink. "Hatton Garden for the jewellers, Miss? And would that be the Montevideo in South America – Uruguay?"

Meanwhile Hannah was leaning over her editor's desk, pleading and reasoning with him, still patient after a succession of head-shaking refusals from him. "Look, Joe, I have a hunch something could break in South America." She kept her fingers crossed under the desk "I was right about Poland, wasn't I?"

Joe agreed but shook his head, "Everybody was right about Poland, everybody who could read the writing on the wall."

"Maybe, but I get these hunches and they come good."

"Yeah? So what about Spain - that hunch? That was good? You damn near got shot by a firing-squad."

"I sent some good stories out of Spain."

"All right, but – "

"And I want to go. I'm due a vacation after this last year and I'm going."

Joe spread his hands, "So now you tell me? You waste a half-hour of my time asking and now you tell me you're going anyway." But he recognised the determination in that flat statement and was silent for a time, then: "OK. You did a hell of a fine job in Spain *and* Poland, so take the time off, with pay. Have a vacation. But I'm not picking up the check for this trip without you turn in a story. Till then the expenses are on you So when are you going?"

"Just as soon as I can fix it up " Hannah pulled his telephone across the desk towards her and asked, "All right if I make a call or two?"

Joe pointed a thick finger at her, "Not to South America."

Hannah grinned at him now that the battle, if not total victory, was won. "No, just Cook's and some shippers."

She found Sarah in the bar at the Ritz and the girl called a

waiter and ordered a dry Martini: "A large one, please."

Hannah asked, "Are we celebrating?"

Sarah nodded, "There's a French ship called the *Formose* that sails from Le Havre on Saturday."

Hannah nodded in her turn, "Calling at Casablanca, Rio and Santos on the way to Montevideo. I know. I've booked us a cabin. Now we have to go to the office to confirm it."

Sarah said, "I've got the money to pay my share."

Hannah saw the cord had gone from around Sarah's throat but her dress, and the coat thrown over the back of a chair, were well worn articles that had served her these last months on the road. Hannah wondered if Sarah's jewels had raised just enough for her fare? Or was she keeping a bit by in case she did not find her father in Montevideo? But however . . .

The Martini came and Hannah lifted her glass to the girl, "OK, kid, let's go. Montevideo, here we come!"

Some three weeks later, at the beginning of December, the cruiser *Ajax* called at the Falkland Islands and Robert Hurst went ashore in the liberty boat. So did Donovan. They met, not by arrangement but mischance, in the back yard of a pub in Port Stanley after the sun had gone down. Both of them were sober but a stone turned under Donovan's foot as he made to pass Hurst. He staggered and threw out a hand to grab at the other figure seen dimly in the dusk. Hurst thought he saw a punch aimed at his head, ducked and countered. His own blow took Donovan on the side of the jaw and turned the big man's stagger into a fall.

For a split-second Donovan did not believe it but then he bounced to his feet. To his mind Hurst had finally added injury to insult and now was the time for accounting. There was a flurry of flying fists and Hurst was laid on his back. Donovan was cool now, anger under control, boxing efficiently, measuring Hurst for the knockout, waiting for him.

He moved in as Hurst got his legs under him and his hands up. Then a man stepped between them, his arms spread wide to plant a hand on the chest of each. He was thin, white-haired and none too steady on his feet but he held them apart and said thickly, "Give over! One o' you will be

the death of the other."

They stood back, afraid of hurting him, and he almost fell without their support. They moved in together to hold him under the arms and he said, "Think I've had enough. For now. Here, you take me home and I'll stand the pair o' you a drink."

Hurst's eyes met those of Donovan over the old man's head and Donovan mouthed, "Daft old bastard!" Hurst agreed, but they half-carried him between them as he directed. "Along here . . . turn down here . . . there we are." 'There' was an open boat lying at the quayside. They got him down the ladder and into the sternsheets where he tumbled at the engine until it fired, when he took the tiller and steered the boat out of the harbour. The two young men sat at opposite ends of a thwart just forward of the engine. As they met the sea Donovan demanded, half amused, half appalled, "Here! Where the hell are you taking us?"

"Home. Stand the pair o' you a drink. Said I would." He leaned on the tiller to turn the boat's head and set it running along the coast.

Donovan sucked at grazed knuckles and Hurst felt tenderly at his face. Donovan said, remembering with returning resentment, "Do you lash out at everybody some nights? As if it was full moon?"

Hurst stared at him, "What do you mean? You threw one at me."

"Like hell I did!" Donovan pointed a finger, "I trod on a rock and keeled over, put out a hand to save myself and you laid into me!"

"Because I thought . . . "

Donovan said, "Ah!" Then: "But while we're at it, you've been a bit bloody-minded lately, Professor. Like when you threw your letter away. I cracked some joke and you gave me the hard word."

Hurst was quiet a moment, then: "Sorry. I'd had some bad news. And I don't like being called Professor."

Donovan said again, "Ah! Well, you're always reading or writing, Profess—" He broke off there as he caught Hurst's eye, then grinned and said, "All right." He nodded at the old man in the stern, "D'ye think he will stand us a drink?"

He did. When he finally ran the boat into the shore and led the way up to his cottage they found it warm and comfortable. He produced a bottle of whisky and filled their glasses then got out his fiddle and played for them. They talked, laughed and sang, separately and sometimes all three of them together.

"Bloody *hell*!" said Donovan when it was time for them to return to their ship. The wind had got up and was whipping white streamers of foam from the tops of the big green waves rolling in to crash on the beach. There was no question of putting off in the boat to run back along the coast to Port Stanley nor of walking across the pathless open country. The old man put them up for the night and by the morning the wind had moderated and he took them back in the boat, complaining about his head all the way. They found *Ajax* had sailed without them.

"Fly off the seaplane!" Gustav Moehle, captain of *Brandenburg*, sat in his high chair on the bridge as dawn broke and the sun rose. The cruiser was steaming off the coast of West Africa. The Arado seaplane was launched from the catapult amidships and Kurt Larsen watched it fly off, first dipping towards the sea as it left the catapult then lifting, climbing away. Its pilot was under orders to search for Allied shipping in the vicinity and then report back by wireless the positions and courses of any found. It was a tactic tried and proved; *Brandenburg* had sunk five ships since she started her raiding cruise two months before.

The tactic worked again. An hour later the Arado's pilot reported a ship to the westward and Moehle grinned. He ordered the change of course and *Brandenburg* increased speed to intercept. Kurt Larsen, like many another officer, searched for the ship using a pair of binoculars but it was the big rangefinder high on the cruiser's control top that first picked up the merchantman at a distance of twenty miles.

That gap closed only slowly because it was a stern chase, if it could be called a chase at all because the tramp steamer was not running away, unaware she was being pursued. She had no reason to suspect the ship closing her from astern was an enemy. Moehle traded on this when the range steadily

shortened by ordering his signal yeoman: "Hoist the French tricolour!" Using this ruse he was alongside and close enough to read the name on the tramp's bow and stern before her crew realised their danger.

There was danger because Moehle ordered the signal to be hoisted calling on the SS *Greenleaf* to stop and not to attempt to use her wireless. Her captain obeyed the first instruction but not the second. When *Brandenburg*'s wireless officers heard the merchantman sending they jammed her signal and reported it to Moehle on the bridge. He ordered, "Open fire!"

The 40mm guns swept the superstructure of the tramp and silenced the wireless. Men on the bridge and in the wireless office were killed in the process but Moehle had no choice and looked on grim-faced. He dared not let the *Greenleaf* broadcast his position. He was well aware that the Royal Navy was hunting over the seas of the world for raiders like his ship and *Graf Spee*.

Kurt Larsen commanded the boarding party of two junior officers and thirty men. He was first to climb the ladder hanging against the black-painted, rust-scaled side of *Greenleaf*. Once aboard he went straight to her bridge and her captain while the rest of his party scattered about the ship. Some went to the wireless office, some to the cabins, in particular that of the captain to hunt for papers. Others stripped the covers from the holds to find out what cargo they held. They worked quickly and efficiently with hardly an order from Kurt. They had all done this before.

As Larsen stepped onto the bridge *Greenleaf*'s captain stood in his way. He was a man in his late sixties but still erect and neat in a white duck uniform, though there were dark stains on the front of the jacket. He had grey eyes set in nests of wrinkles as if he was a man who smiled a lot, but he was not smiling now and the grey eyes were hard. His voice shook with anger and outrage as he accused Kurt Larsen: "You've murdered my second mate and my wireless officer!"

Kurt saw that the dark stains were blood and a dead man lay below the screen at the front of the bridge. He snapped a hand to his cap in salute. While he saw the need to enforce

Moehle's orders he could feel no pride in this action. Perhaps that showed when he said, "I am sorry, but we could not allow you to send a warning signal."

"In case the Navy catches you?" The merchant skipper picked up his cap from a chart table at the back of the bridge and clapped it on his head. He glared at Kurt and told him, "You can try to survive by murder but somebody will get off a signal and then the Navy will hunt you down!" He turned and climbed slowly down the ladder from the bridge. The boat was waiting at the ship's side to take him across to *Brandenburg*.

Kurt Larsen tried to shrug off the warning, collected his boarding party, confirmed that all the *Greenleaf*'s crew were down in the boats and the dead taken to *Brandenburg* for burial with respect. Then he saw the scuttling charges set and he went down to his boat with the last of his men. The pinnace growled back to the cruiser and he sat in the sternsheets with his head turned on his shoulder. As they were coming alongside *Brandenburg* he heard the muffled thump of the explosions, the timing devices setting them off within seconds of each other. The *Greenleaf* lurched to the shock then quickly listed and began to sink. By the time he was aboard the cruiser and the pinnace hoisted inboard the decks of the tramp were awash. Her stern reared up as her bow went under and she sank with a whistling of blown off steam and rumbling as her engines broke loose inside her.

Kurt turned away from a sight that was always painful to a seaman. He saw the captain of the *Greenleaf* just a few yards away and wanted to express his sorrow to the old man but the cold grey eyes glared right through him without forgiveness.

Kurt tried to shrug that off, too; this was war and the old man and his ship were victims of it, but German ships were also being sunk and their crews killed. This had been a successful action. The enemy had been deprived of a ship and her cargo at no loss to *Brandenburg*.

Later that day he learned that was not completely true when Gustav Moehle gathered his officers about him in the wardroom to tell them of his plans. He began by cocking an eye at the pilot of the Arado and asking, "I understand all is

not well with the seaplane?"

The pilot nodded reluctant agreement: "The engine has cracked beyond repair. I think because it heats when we are in flight but then is showered by the sea water when we come down to the sea. It is an air-cooled radial engine."

Moehle interjected drily but in good humour, "I had noticed."

The other officers laughed, Kurt Larsen among them, and the pilot held up a hand in apology: "Sorry! However, the mechanics have had to admit defeat. She will not fly again until we reach a workshop in Germany."

Moehle nodded, "So we must manage without the seaplane, useful though she has been, but you will not have to wait too long for that workshop. The engineers tell me we must return to Germany soon for dockyard work on our engines. We meet our oil tanker tomorrow and will refuel from her and transfer these latest prisoners to her. I think they may not be too comfortable because the captain of the oiler complains that his accommodation for prisoners is already crowded. But that is good news, a sign of our success."

He was referring to the crews of the five ships previously sunk and the officers applauded. Then Moehle went on, "But we have some accommodation of our own for prisoners. Before returning to Germany I propose making one final sweep along the coast of Brazil and off the estuary of the River Plate. Those are busy shipping lanes, particularly off the Plate, with British ships sailing from Buenos Aires and Montevideo. We should find rich pickings."

He was cheered by the wardroom, Kurt applauding with the rest, but then he remembered the captain of the *Greenleaf*, now in that prisoners' 'accommodation', one of the locked cabins below. He had warned, "Somebody will get off a signal and then the Navy will hunt you down."

Some two hundred miles away *Kapitan zur See* Hans Langsdorff was making a similar speech to the officers of *Graf Spee*, stating his intention to make a last big killing among the shipping out of Buenos Aires and Montevideo before sailing for home. His ship had just sunk the SS *Doric Star*.

Commodore Harwood had four ships in his squadron patrolling off the coast of South America. Two of them, both cruisers mounting eight-inch guns, returned to the Falklands on 9 December. *Cumberland* was to undertake a badly needed self refit at Port Stanley while *Exeter* was under orders to sail north to join Harwood off the estuary of the River Plate. There he was flying his flag in *Ajax*, one of the six-inch gun cruisers, with the other, *Achilles*, in company.

He had received a report of a signal from the *Doric Star* beginning 'RRR', indicating an attack by a surface raider. The signal said she was being gunned by a pocket battleship and gave her position. The raider might have sailed in any direction from there but Harwood calculated that if she headed for the estuary of the River Plate she would be there on or about 13 December. He had therefore ordered the concentration of the three cruisers.

When *Exeter* sailed for the Plate she had Hurst and Donovan aboard her.

8

Raider!

Smith stepped out onto the deck of the SS *Whitby*, out of Southampton and bound for Montevideo, in the last of the night. There was a hint of greyness along the horizon to port but no sign of the first flush of dawn as yet. To starboard but some forty miles distant lay the coast of Brazil.

He wore an old sports jacket over a thick sweater, his hands were jammed in the pockets of his trousers and his shoulders hunched. He had woken and been unable to sleep again, plagued by thoughts of his daughter and son. He was travelling further from the first with every turn of the *Whitby*'s propellers and God only knew if or when he would see the second. The boy, young man rather, was in *Ajax* and somewhere off the coast of South America, but that was a huge area.

Smith swung onto the ladder to the bridge and began to climb. The Admiralty had told him this appointment to join the office of the Naval Attache in Montevideo was for a limited period, to give him a half-year of relative stability after the years of secret operations. Smith did not believe it. He had a lurking suspicion he was being sent to free a younger man for a command – his command, that had been promised to him over the years. He was being shunted off out of the way. What was the name some of the young officers had for people like him, veterans of another war brought back for this one? Dug-out. That was it. And Admiralty thought he was a dug-out.

The watch-keeping officer on *Whitby*'s bridge was a young man, Maltby, the Second Mate. He grinned at Smith, who had a standing invitation from the ship's master to visit the bridge whenever he wished. "G'morning, sir."

Smith grunted an answer, despondent, bitter, and Maltby

thought. The gentlemen of the Royal Navy are a little liverish this morning. He left the slight, frail-seeming officer alone.

Smith prowled restlessly about the bridge, glanced at the course steered by the quartermaster then moved aft to the table at the back of the bridge and studied the chart there They were off the coast of Brazil and some nine hundred miles north of the estuary of the River Plate, where lay Montevideo There were rivers and ports between, though none of them visited by the *Whitby*, and Smith's finger traced them Some parts of this coast were densely inhabited, modern cities rising by the sea, but others were empty, sparsely peopled It was a huge continent.

He straightened, thinking that he should not visit his own preoccupations on others, and walked forward to stand by Maltby and say drily, "Good morning, again. Pity you can't choose which passenger comes to the bridge this early."

Maltby accepted the oblique apology and the inference, welcomed Smith's sudden grin. The Mate laughed, "I can't imagine the Doctor up here now She's a strange girl. Hardly stirs from her cabin and I haven't heard her say more than a dozen words."

All they knew of Véronique Duclos was that she had only recently qualified as a Doctor of Medicine in Paris and was on her way to visit her parents. Her father was a minor diplomat in the French mission at Montevideo Maltby's words had summed up Smith's impression of her. He agreed, "Mademoiselle Duclos is a quiet girl " Though he made the mental reservation that still waters could run deep He added, "And dedicated to her profession When we were in Charleston she spent most of her time looking around the local hospitals."

Whitby had been held up in the dockyard in South Carolina for over a week making repairs to her propeller shaft The French girl had been disappointed at the delay: "I could have travelled on the *Formose* I came in this ship to reach Montevideo sooner " But then she shrugged it off. *Whitby* was cheaper than the liner

Smith and Maltby stood in companionable silence for a minute, then the Mate asked, "Have you sailed this coast

before?"

"The other side," Smith answered, "the west coast, off Chile." In *Thunder* in 1917 he had fought two enemy cruisers to a bloody finish. "A long time ago."

"It's pretty quiet around here " Maltby reached out to tap his knuckles on a varnished rail, " – touch wood. No U-boat sinkings. Yet. Nor any surface raiders. Those German pocket battleships and cruisers are hunting off the coast of Africa."

And that was when the look-out on the port wing of the bridge called, "Ship coming up astern of us, sir! Maybe a mile or so away. Can't make out much of her but she's closing fast."

Maltby and Smith joined him, quickly crossing the bridge, Maltby lifting his own binoculars that hung from their strap against his chest. He peered through them at the ship that Smith saw only as a furred silhouette in the night, and muttered, "I don't know. Looks like she might be . . . " He hesitated, then unslung the glasses and passed them to Smith, asked, "What do you make of her, sir?"

Smith focused the lenses and now the silhouette came up sharp, still too distant to be positive, but – He said, "From what I can see of her, and the speed she seems to be making, she could be a warship."

Maltby chewed his lip a moment, then turned to a voice-pipe: "I'm going to call the skipper."

Captain Hesketh climbed to the bridge in a dressing-gown pulled on over pyjamas, carpet slippers on his feet. He scowled through Maltby's glasses and rumbled agreement, "She's a warship. Only a half-mile astern of us now and a big bone in her teeth." They could see with the naked eye the white bow wave thrown up by her speed. "But she's probably a neutral, Yankee or Brazilian, or one of Harwood's squadron."

Smith thought, *Ajax*? And was his son aboard her, looking towards him now? That was an odd feeling . .

He watched the ship come up, closing the gap between her and the *Whitby*, until she was just astern. She was still edging in towards the merchantman. Hesketh complained, "What does she think she's doing? She'll hit us if she comes

any nearer. She's damn near alongside now."

The warship was only a cable's length, two hundred yards away now. Colour meant nothing in this pre-dawn light. She was the size of one of Harwood's cruisers but the lay-out of her turrets on the hull, her single funnel . Smith said, "She's not British."

Hesketh spun around to stare at him, "What?"

And Maltby said quickly, "She's signalling " The light flickered from the superstructure of the cruiser and Maltby read: "Stop – or I – fire Do – not – use wireless."

Hesketh swore, "She's a bloody Jerry! Get down and send off a raider signal!" He stumped across the bridge as Maltby dropped down the ladder to the wireless room below The quartermaster glanced up from the compass at his captain as Hesketh came to stand at his side. Hesketh told him, "Hard astarboard! We might get away from him while it's still dark."

Smith doubted it He watched the raider as the quartermaster spun the wheel, putting the helm hard over A light stuttered again from the cruiser's bridge and Smith read. "Stop – or – " Then the helm order took effect and *Whitby*'s bow began to swing away from the cruiser. The glass exploded from the side and front of the bridge and Smith threw himself down on the deck. It was only as he lay there, heart thumping, that the thinking part of his mind caught up with his animal reaction. He realised that a burst of machine-gun fire had swept the bridge.

The firing had ceased now and he lifted his head The quartermaster lay dead and Hesketh beside him, their blood staining the deck. The wheel turned idly with no hand on it The port look-out also lay on his back, still except for his head lolling with the motion of the ship His counterpart out on the starboard wing had also gone down but his face showed, eyes wide in shock staring at Smith.

The wheel drew Smith He crawled across to it, climbed to his feet though staying crouched and seized the spokes He saw that *Whitby* was still in the turn though starting to straighten out of it. The raider had come around to keep station alongside He saw the lick of flame from her upperworks and the machine-gun fire crashed and whined about

him as he dropped to the deck again. But he kept his grip on the spokes of the wheel and spun it.

The firing checked again and again he lifted to his knees. *Whitby*'s bow was coming around now, going back to her original course and the cruiser was matching her turn. Smith saw Maltby climb onto the bridge and heard him say, "'Sparks' is sending that signal."

Smith shouted to him, "Get down!" That was too late. The bow had swung past that original course and still edged around, was swinging towards the raider. The machine-gun fired and this time was joined by a quick-firing gun, Smith thought it was an anti-aircraft Oerlikon or Bofors and it banged viciously, faster than a heartbeat. Maltby's heart was stopped as the machine-gun fire punched him across the bridge. This time there was no pause in the firing. The shells from the anti-aircraft gun slammed into the superstructure below the bridge while bullets ripped into the timber of the bridge screen above Smith's head. He lay flattened to the deck but he still held the wheel, hard over.

He felt the collision. It came as a shudder through the ship's frame, transmitted through the deck planking, as *Whitby* seemed to check for an instant then went on. Smith let go of the wheel and put his hands over his head as the splinters rained down. The anti-aircraft gun was joined by another weapon, bigger and heavier, firing at a slower rate and he felt the shock as the shells from that one tore into the hull. Then the engines stopped and he heard the hiss and roar as they blew off steam. Seconds later the firing ceased. His ears rang and all he could hear for a while was the whistle of escaping steam.

He lay still for a minute or so. Then he was climbing cautiously to his feet, eyes seeking the raider, when Buckley pounded up the ladder to the bridge. He checked at sight of Smith and said, "Oh, my God!" Then he came on, seized Smith by the shoulders and asked, "Are you hurt, sir?"

Smith answered curtly, "Of course not!" He felt breathless now and knew his hands were starting to shake from reaction. He shrugged out of Buckley's grasp and shoved past him. He caught that look on Buckley's face that he had seen a long time ago in another war, a look that was part

disbelief, part exasperation. Then he was out on the port wing of the bridge, calling back over his shoulder, "See to that look-out!" And looking along the deck of *Whitby*, then over to the raider.

There was light now for dawn was not far off The flush on the eastern horizon showed that the sun would soon be up. The cruiser stood etched against that blood-red background. She had also stopped but had drawn ahead so her stern was barely a hundred yards from *Whitby*'s bow. Smith did not look at her stern. He could see her fore part better with every second as the light grew and there was no mistaking where the merchantman had struck her The buckled plates showed on the waterline and near her stern. The damage stretched for ten to twenty feet.

Buckley said behind him, "You dented her good and proper. I'd just got on deck when we hit her. The shock put me on my back and it heeled that bastard over before we rubbed off her and away. Her skipper won't repair that at sea; he'll need a dockyard." Buckley's tone held satisfaction. He went on, "Look-out's all right, sir. just shook up a bit. And she's sending a boat, sir."

The raider was, Smith had seen the pinnace, crowded with men in white tropical suits and armed with carbines, sweep away from the cruiser's side. His gaze came down to the deck below and he saw men there. They lined the rail and stared across at the cruiser. Some, those about to come on watch, were fully dressed but most wore the few clothes they had grabbed when the shelling started And there was one tall young woman, her dark hair hanging loose on her shoulders.

Smith stepped to the head of the ladder to call down to her, "Mamzelle Duclos!" She spun around to stare up at him through the big, horn rimmed spectacles and clutched the thick woollen dressing-gown about her. Smith advised her, "You should get dressed and pack a case Try to take everything you'll really need but only as much as you can carry " There would be no porters.

She asked, dark eyes wide and startled, still confused by this dawn attack, "Will we have to leave the ship?" Her English was good, though the French accent was strong.

"I believe so." He watched her hurry away below.

Buckley said, "Another ship closing us, sir. Looks like she's sailing in company with that cruiser."

An oil tanker, big as *Whitby*, was within a mile and coming on towards them. Smith thought that Buckley was right and this oiler was a tender for the cruiser. Then he saw that Gillard, the First Mate, was now on deck and organising a ladder to be hung over the side for the raider's boat now closing the ship.

The pinnace swung in against *Whitby*'s side and an officer in the boat's sternsheets worked his way forward to the foot of the ladder and began to climb it. He wore whites with the silver braid and single star of an *Oberleutnant zur See* on his shoulder, a pistol in a holster on his belt. As he stepped onto the deck he saluted then looked around him. "Where is the captain?"

He addressed Gillard, but Smith answered from the bridge above: "The captain's dead. You killed him."

The officer's head went back and he stared up at Smith. Recognition was immediate and mutual; Kurt Larsen showed it, eyes narrowing and his hand going to his pistol, but Smith remained impassive. Kurt's men were coming over the rail now and gathering around him. He called out orders to them but with one eye always on Smith, then beckoned two of the men to follow him and climbed the ladder to the bridge.

He demanded of Smith, "You are?"

"I am a naval officer." Smith gave his name and rank.

Kurt Larsen answered grimly, "That is not all." Then he ordered his two men: "He goes back to the ship. Don't take your eyes off him." The escorts hefted their carbines and scowled at Smith. He stared past them at the cruiser and now read her name on her stern: *Brandenburg*.

He was given five minutes to throw some kit together then he was hustled down into the pinnace. He was soon followed by Buckley and an apprehensive Véronique Duclos. The girl had dressed in trousers and a blouse. She carried a small suitcase. *Whitby*'s boats had been lowered by her crew and the men, Gillard and the other officers among them, had gone down into them. Now they started to pull towards the

oil tanker, stopped a few hundred yards away. Smith could read her name now, painted on her bow: *Lemvig*. Danish? Probably she was posing as a neutral when not in company with the cruiser.

But now he shouted up at the young officer on the deck above, "Why is this girl with us? She is a non combatant and should be with the ship's company in the oiler!"

Kurt Larsen glanced over the side and told him, "The lady goes with you." He did not argue, nor explain. He knew the master of the *Lemvig* for a hard man; the prisoners aboard her, once in Germany, would remain prisoners for the rest of the war. But Kurt believed that his captain, Moehle, would transfer the French girl to a neutral ship at the first opportunity.

Ten minutes later his men poured down into the pinnace, several of them carrying sacks containing the ship's papers and any others they could find. Kurt descended last of all, took his place in the sternsheets and the pinnace headed towards the cruiser. Smith sat in the waist, already separated from Buckley and Veronique a few feet away, all three of them surrounded by Kurt Larsen's armed men. Smith watched the *Whitby* being left behind and heard the muffled explosions of the scuttling charges the boarding party had set in her hull. The ship lurched, listed and began to settle.

He turned to look inboard and met Véronique's worried gaze, Buckley's scowl. The big leading hand was not taking kindly to being a prisoner of war while the French girl did not yet appreciate that she was. Smith was not entitled to the meagre privileges of a prisoner of war. The young *Oberleutnant zur See* would take care of that.

It was confirmed when Smith came before *Kaptan zur See* Gustav Moehle, seated behind the desk in his cabin. Kurt Larsen stood at one side, cap under his arm. Moehle was sharp eyed and alert, of Smith's height and build as he was of Smith's generation. They were contemporaries and professional equals but more than the desk separated them now they were at war. *Brandenburg*'s captain studied Smith, then glanced down at the sheet of paper Kurt Larsen had laid on his desk and read from it Smith's name and rank. He looked up: "Correct?" And when Smith nodded, Moehle asked,

"Your ship?"

Smith answered, "You have my name and rank. That is all the information I am required to give under the Geneva Convention."

Moehle was silent for a moment, examining this man in civilian dress, nondescript save for the pale blue eyes. Moehle said, "If you are only a naval officer then that is the case." He pointed at the young officer and said, "This is *Oberleutnant zur See* Kurt Larsen. He says he saw you in Spain and that you were the British agent who kidnapped a prisoner from the *Guardias*. He says he saw you again in Berlin not long before the outbreak of war. What do you say to that?"

Smith shook his head, "I have nothing to add."

Moehle nodded acceptance of that, but: "If we find that you are not simply a naval officer when we return to Germany it will be a different matter. That will be soon."

Smith was taken down to a cabin below the waterline, one of several doors in a row, a lifejacket hanging outside each one. He was locked into it, Kurt Larsen telling him drily, "All these cabins were fitted with locks because we expected visitors."

The steel door closed and the key turned. Smith sat down on the side of his bunk. Moehle had said his ship would soon return to Germany. Once there the evidence of the young *Oberleutnant* would convict Smith. He had no doubt of that. This morning he had been bitter because he had not been given a command. Now he was to be shot as a spy.

In his cabin Moehle told Larsen, "Their wireless operator tried to get off a signal but we jammed it."

Whitby's Wireless Officer had sent the signal opening: "RRR Gunned cruiser . . . " and added the position Maltby had given him. The signal had been picked up by Commodore Harwood's squadron off the estuary of the River Plate. The 'RRR' signifying an attack by a raider had come through clearly but jamming had rendered the *Whitby*'s position unreadable.

Minutes later Harwood's three cruisers were in a fight to the death.

9

"Enemy in sight!"

As Smith had stepped out onto the deck of the *Whitby* before dawn that morning so Robert Hurst had rolled lithely out of his hammock on the mess deck of *Exeter*. He was running still half-asleep as the alarm rattlers sounded and the bugles blared the call to 'Action Stations' He was aware of the burly figure of Bill Donovan pounding behind as he joined in the streams of running men who crowded the passages and ladders of the cruiser. Streams joined to become rivers, or split, or crossed but there was never a collision. The crew of the *Exeter*, like those of *Ajax* and *Achilles*, had done this before.

Their mouths were open as they panted and their faces yellow under the lights, eyes blank like his own and only seconds from sleep. Then he was out on the upper deck in the coolness of the night air with the stars pin-pricking the pre dawn darkness. The cruiser was making fourteen knots and the wind of her passage was at his back as he headed aft, still running hard.

He found the rest of the damage control party in the waist, stopped as he came up to them and caught his breath. Donovan had been only a yard behind him and they exchanged grins. The race had barely winded them and the rest of this party, all of them young men in their teens or early twenties. All, that is, except the Stoker Petty Officer in command, an ageing veteran close on thirty.

But they were fit and used to this, could make jokes even as they grumbled as a matter of principle. This was not preparation for a battle but only a precaution This was Dawn Action Stations and all their days at sea began this way.

Someone asked out of the darkness, "What day is this?"

Another replied, "Wednesday."

"No, I meant what *date*." He paused, then finished, "I thought yesterday was the twelfth. Right?"

There was silence a moment then Hurst said, "That's right. Today's the thirteenth."

Donovan said amiably, "Unlucky for some. That's you and me, mate, aboard this tub when we should be in a proper ship."

That brought jeers, laughter and ribald comments about *Ajax*. The sky paled above them, reddened in the east as *Exeter* cut through the dark silver sea. They could see the other two cruisers ahead of her now, first *Achilles* then beyond her *Ajax*, leading the line. Then the sun was up and it was full day, the horizon all around the three ships was empty and their crews stood down from Action Stations

The rest of the party headed below to catch another half-hour of sleep before the start of the working day; when you kept watches you snatched sleep whenever you could. But the Stoker P O. called, "Hey, Hurst!" And sent Robert to the bridge with a message.

He delivered it and then lingered, sniffing the air and curious. He spotted a spare pair of binoculars and swept the horizon with them. When the smoke was sighted that same curiosity made him train the glasses around to focus on it, then wait for the vessel making it to come up on the horizon. He expected a merchantman and was not surprised when he heard the Commodore's order to *Exeter*, the flags on *Ajax*'s yard read by the signal yeoman on *Exeter*'s bridge: "Investigate smoke " and if it was a British merchantman bound for Montevideo, *Exeter* was to pass her a message to be delivered to the British consul there.

Hurst swayed as the cruiser heeled in the turn, swinging out of the line, altering course to the north west to close the distant feather of smoke *Ajax* and *Achilles* held on to the north east. Hurst took away the glasses for a moment to wipe his eyes.

He wondered if his father was at this moment on the bridge of another ship, searching the horizon. He had shied away from asking questions aboard *Ajax* but in *Exeter* the men were virtual strangers, like people from another town.

He had inserted seeming casual questions into conversations with some of the older men on the lower deck, veterans of the last war. So he had heard something of the actions in which Smith had fought, of his recklessness and icy calm. And of his episodes with women. He had to force a smile as he listened to those.

But then he remembered the girl in Rio. And there had been others. So . . . Judge not, lest ye be judged?

He lifted the glasses to his eyes and looked again, refocused slightly. There was the smoke made by the expected merchantman and under it, standing above the hard line of the horizon now . . . He stared, swallowed, seeing that big control top that could only belong to . . .

He heard the sighting report bawled across the bridge as someone got his voice to work before Hurst, and then the captain ordering, "Make to the Commodore: I think it is a pocket battleship." The image of the ship was hard and clear seen through the binoculars now, lifting above the horizon so he could see the two turrets, one forward and the other aft, each of them mounting three of those big 11-inch guns. The ship was huge in the lenses. Murderous.

He set the glasses aside and as he started to run he saw the signal breaking out on the yard and the triangular yellow flag with a blue stripe that was the letter 'N' in the alphabetical flag code and meant 'Enemy in sight'. Then he was racing down the ladders with his heart thumping and that was not just because of the physical exertion. The alarm rattlers and bugles were sounding again and this time in earnest. This was no drill or precautionary stand to at dawn. This heralded a battle.

He ran with the rest, the ship again filled with swift snaking lines or pounding crowds of men who had left whatever they were doing, so many were only half-dressed or barely clothed in only shorts or even a towel, some part shaved or part washed. They ran at the bugle's call for this was a matter of life or death. Hurst shivered.

This time he had a start on the rest and was one of the first to reach his post in action in the waist. But Donovan arrived only seconds later and panted, "What the hell's going on?"

Hurst told him, breathlessly, and that was not because of

the running, either: "Pocket battleship."

"Bloody hellfire!" Donovan blinked at him and questioned hopefully, "Are you sure? They might ha' made a mistake."

Hurst crushed that hope. "I saw it. I was up on the bridge with a pair of glasses and saw it, standing high as a block of flats and six big guns in two turrets. You know what those control towers look like and there's no mistaking them. That's a pocket battleship out there."

He had an audience now, the Stoker P.O. and the rest of the party crowded around him. One of them said, "Bet you're glad you're here and not in *Ajax*. One o' those 11-inch bricks'll go right through her."

True. And the pocket battleship's big guns hurled a broadside 3,000 yards further than any of the cruisers and with a weight of 4,500 pounds, while their three broadsides together only totalled 3,000 pounds. On paper the pocket battleship would murder the three cruisers.

She could be seen over the bow on the far horizon. The other two cruisers were away to starboard of *Exeter* and rapidly diverging away from her. Harwood had always intended to split his force in two divisions in this fashion so as to hold the enemy in a crossfire between them. Those were sound tactics. But Hurst reasoned coldly that if the German skipper knew what he was doing he would neutralise *Exeter* first, as she was the worst threat to his ship with her 8-inch guns. He could stand off and use his greater range to hit her without being hit. Hurst thought that neutralise was another word for sink, burn or blow to pieces this ship whose deck throbbed beneath his feet. And what of himself, a frail human target?

His father had fought in actions like the one which lay ahead but he was fearless, cool. Or so people said of him. But had he known the excitement and the dry-mouthed terror that Robert was feeling now? And suppressed them, hidden them and so gained that reputation for cold courage?

Robert looked at the faces around him and saw tension but not fear. Donovan was grinning at him and Hurst found one corner of his own mouth twitching in a responsive smile. It came naturally and was not a bluff, he was glad of that.

The ship shook as the turrets fired a broadside, all six 8-inch guns speaking with one thunderous voice. Then again, the long barrels pointing skyward at extreme elevation and hurling the shells across ten miles of sea, soaring a mile high in their flight before plunging down to their target. The enemy was firing back, huge towers of dirty water lifting out of the sea on either side of *Exeter*; she was straddled. Then one of the big 11-inch shells burst in the sea close alongside.

Steel splinters scythed across the cruiser's deck and hull like a traversing machine-gun. They tore holes in the hull, cut cables and wrecked one of the two Walrus flying-boats on its catapult. They tore holes in men. So Hurst's party ran not only to deal with damage to the ship but to aid the wounded and take away the dead. And *Exeter* was being hit now.

He and Donovan carried a man below, cradled in their arms between them with his blood soaking them. They took him to a sick bay that was steadily filling with wounded. It had taken a direct hit from an 11-inch shell that had passed through but by some miracle had not burst. Smoke and fumes swirled, setting them coughing and wiping at smarting eyes. But they had to leave their wounded man with the others ranked in the sick bay; there was nowhere else for him to go.

They climbed to the deck again and did what they could where they could. There was more than enough work for the damage control parties. Hurst and Donovan went where their duty called them as *Exeter* was hit again and again. 'B' turret was split open and the crews of the two guns decimated. The splinters from that burst riddled the bridge and slaughtered all but a handful of the bridge staff. Hurst saw the captain, face bleeding and eyes lacerated by tiny shards of steel, leading the handful away to the after steering position to con the cruiser from there.

'A' turret was hit and mangled, fired no more.

Hurst laboured in the waist, Donovan at his side, hauling at wreckage in a mist of petrol shed by one of the tubby little Walrus flying boats, its tank ripped open by splinters. Both of them were aware that if the petrol ignited they and all around them would burn like torches. The wire stay between

foremast and main had come down across the two aircraft, pinning them to the catapults. But one man climbed up, ignoring the bursting shells and the blast as the twin 8-inch guns in 'Y' turret fired, the only turret in action now. He dragged the heavy wire away so the two wrecked Walrus could be manhandled over the side into the sea.

Hurst exclaimed, "My God! Who's that?"

Donovan answered, "Feller called Shoesmith. Got his nerve."

Hurst silently agreed to that. Then he led a party forward as *Exeter* was hit right in the bow. He saw the smoke of *Ajax* and *Achilles* distantly to starboard, so Harwood's two divisions still held the enemy between them. The pocket battleship tearing *Exeter* apart was a toy seen over the starboard bow on the far horizon. Then Hurst realised that she had turned away and was now heading into the estuary of the River Plate. She would have to turn again to fight her way past the three cruisers – or end bottled up in Buenos Aires or Montevideo.

That tiny silhouette of a ship prickled with flashes of winking light as she fired her broadsides. Some instinct or a guardian angel warned Hurst and he bawled to the men with him, "Get down!" They copied him as he sprawled flat behind the mangled 'A' turret, just as a shell fragmented in the sea close alongside flinging another lethal hail of steel fragments across the deck. Any man standing would have been cut down. Then he was shouting, "Come on!" And they were up again and running.

Then later in the nightmare, as the pounding went on, a shell smashed through *Exeter*'s side and burst on the lower deck. Hurst and Donovan led their own little knot of men down into the passages. They were filled with smoke and pitch dark as the power supply had been cut. Hurst peered out through the eyepieces of his respirator, trying to pierce the darkness with the beam of his torch but it only showed the coiling, rolling clouds of smoke – and Donovan's big frame just ahead of him. Then *Exeter* heeled in a turn, Donovan was caught off balance and staggered, disappeared.

Now Hurst saw the hole through which Donovan had

fallen, four or five feet across and with edges of curled, ragged steel plate, as if the deck had been opened up with a huge tin-opener. He saw it silhouetted against the red light of the flames below and as he knelt at the edge and peered down he saw the fire burning on the flat beneath him and Donovan lying close by it, unmoving.

Hurst shoved back from the edge and turned on the others in the party crowding close behind him. He snatched the coil of line, rope an inch thick, from the shoulder of one of them, took a turn around his waist and thrust the rest at the others. They grabbed it, tailed onto it and he went down through the hole to the hell below.

As he spun briefly on the end of the rope he saw all around the flat, or saw all he could through the smoke. It was an unrecognisable tangle of torn plates and twisted piping lit by the glare from the flames. The fire was close and as his feet touched the deck he felt the heat on the exposed skin of his face and hands, and coming up from below through the soles of his shoes. Donovan's clothes were smouldering and Hurst knew he had only seconds to get out of that hole or he would die there.

He crouched beside Donovan and now the big man's head lifted. He was regaining some sort of consciousness but Hurst could not wait for him to look after himself He passed the rope around Donovan and made it fast, jerked at the slack dangling down from above and saw it snap taut as the other men above took the strain. Hurst got his hands under Donovan's shoulders, started to lift him and now Donovan tried to stand. He was too weak and his legs wavered and buckled but Hurst was able to shove him upright. Then the rope thrummed under his fingers as the men tailed onto it on the deck overhead and walked away with it. Donovan was snatched from the deck and hauled up to the hole through which he had fallen. Hands reached down and seized him, pulled him through.

Hurst waited, choking inside the respirator, lifting one foot after the other as each became too hot to stand on the deck heated by the fire below. He was being grilled alive He gasped out, "Hurry up! For God's sake!" Then the end of the rope dropped down, he twisted it around him, jerked at

it again and he was yanked from the deck and hauled out through the hole as Donovan had been.

He saw there were extinguishers and a hose being brought into action now, but the men who had lifted him out of the hole shoved him along, passing him from hand to hand until he was out on the upper deck again. He found Donovan there, sitting with his back propped against the galley and legs stretched out, his respirator pulled off and lying on the deck beside him. Hurst sank down on the deck at his side, dragged off his own respirator and gulped in air. It was tainted with smoke, fumes and the stench of cordite but he could breathe.

After a minute Donovan stirred and turned to Hurst, told him, "I remember falling, then seeing you bending over me. It was bloody hot. That fire . . . I could see it, feel it. I knew we had to get out but when I tried to stand . . . I think I fell on my head, hell of a bump there." His fingers explored it, gingerly prodding at his hair. He said, "Anyhow, point is, I couldn't ha' got out o' there on my own If you hadn't . . ."

Hurst flapped a hand at him then and silenced him, Donovan realising that he was causing embarrassment. Hurst said, "Well, if you fell on your head you can't have done any damage."

Donovan smiled slowly and said, "All right." Then he was silent.

Hurst started to climb to his feet then paused. He said, "I haven't heard 'Y' turret fire since I came up."

Donovan nodded and winced, "And 'A' and 'B' went earlier. 'Y' makes it a full house."

Now they recalled the damage they had witnessed as they moved about the ship during the action. Donovan said: "The bridge copped it."

"So did the Director and the Transmitting Station. I saw some of the operators out on deck." The Director aimed all three turrets together while the Transmitting Station computed the range and bearing for each shoot.

"We're down at the head and listing And on fire."

"I only know of one 4-inch gun that can still fire."

Hurst straightened and Donovan stood up beside him. They both staggered as *Exeter* heeled over, turning again.

Hurst swallowed as he looked along the length of her. She was a tangle of wreckage from stem to stern, her guns drooping or cocked at odd angles, or silent without power to move the turrets. Smoke billowed from a score or more of rents in her hull and trailed behind her on the wind. For although she was desperately hurt her engines were still intact. Her bow was down by three feet and she listed to starboard because of the weight of water she had taken aboard which now washed heavily about in her hull, but she tore ahead at close to her full speed of thirty knots.

The guns were silent. Hurst saw that *Exeter* had discontinued the action and turned away simply because she had no gun left to fight with. She had done all she could, all that anyone could ask of her. Hurst turned to peer across the waste of sea to the distant pocket battleship. *Ajax* and *Achilles* would have to handle her now. They were still in action. And the pocket battleship was still headed deeper and deeper into the estuary of the Plate with the two cruisers in pursuit, not trying to fight her way past them and out to sea. He wondered, Surely *Exeter* had hurt her?

She had.

The *Formose* was a French liner of 10,000 tons, a lady no longer young, but comfortable, and not fast; she had a top speed of 15 knots. She was employed on the 'milk run' from Le Havre to Buenos Aires, calling at Casablanca, Dakar, Rio de Janeiro, Santos and Montevideo. She had sailed from Le Havre on 11 November and on the morning of 13 December was three days out of Santos and due to call at Montevideo that night.

Hannah Fitzsimmons and Sarah went to the wireless office as they did every forenoon. Hannah had unashamedly used her feminine wiles and professional reputation as a war correspondent to gain them entry, pleading: "I need to know what's going on in the world out there." She also privately acknowledged that the presence of the slender and wide-eyed blonde girl at her side had helped.

Hannah greeted the officer on duty with her usual, "Hi, there! Anything exciting going on?" But he ignored her, sat with one hand holding the headphones pressed close over his

ears, the other gripping a pencil and printing a message in blocks on a signal pad. Then he pushed the headphones back, reached out to a telephone but saw the two women. He said rapidly, "Message from a British cruiser: 'To all British Merchant Ships, one German pocket battleship in position 34.40 South, 51 10 West, steering course 225 at 24 knots.'"

Hannah and Sarah stood still and silent as he reported to his captain on the bridge and listened. Then he put down the telephone and explained excitedly, "We picked up an earlier transmission from the pocket battleship. She's the *Graf Spee*. The navigator has plotted her position. She's only thirty miles from us and running into the estuary as we are! It sounds as though the British cruiser is chasing her!"

Hannah said softly, "Oh, boy! Looks like I was right about a story breaking down here. I just hope I wasn't too right." She eased herself up to sit on the edge of the operator's table, swinging her long legs, and patted the space beside her for Sarah to come up.

Sarah said uneasily, "So you think we might run into her?" She was not afraid because she knew nothing of naval warfare, was ignorant of the threat a pocket battleship might pose.

Hannah pulled a face, "Well, she's close enough, and running into the estuary same as we are I hope she passes us by, because she's about ten knots faster than this old girl so we can't run away and she'll sink us " Then she dug an elbow into Sarah, "But it's a big estuary, 120 miles across. There's plenty of room for her to miss us."

They waited but no more transmissions were received. After a while they left the wireless office, ate lunch in the dining saloon then went on deck. Other passengers were lining the rails, watching for the first sight of land Some of them, those who would be disembarking at Montevideo, talked of packing. They had not been told of the signals received that forenoon.

Hannah and Sarah stood with them for some time then the girl looked down and saw her fingers gripping tightly to the rail She pushed away from it and said, "We're just straining our eyes and our nerves looking for that damned ship. I'm

going to pack." She saw Hannah hesitating and took her arm, "All right, you want a story, to be the first one to see her. Don't worry, if she turns up we'll hear about it soon enough."

Hannah laughed, "Guess you're right there."

They went below.

But by the evening Hannah had talked them onto the bridge. Once there they stood meekly quiet. They saw the uneasy restlessness of the captain and the bridge staff and sensed the increased tension in them when the smoke was sighted off the port quarter Hannah had the powerful binoculars that always travelled with her. Through them they saw the ship come up under the smoke and heard the captain's deep growl of recognition, "She's a pocket battleship."

She grew bigger, looked swift and powerful, dangerous. One of the bridge staff said low-voiced behind them, "She mounts six 11-inch guns. A single shell from any one of them could sink us."

As he spoke *Graf Spee*'s guns jetted smoke and long slivers of flame. That was the first of three salvoes fired one after the other. They waited with the sick emptiness of helpless fear, knowing that if they were the target then death was rushing towards them and they could do nothing about it. But then the seconds ticked by and they realised the fire was not aimed at *Formose*. Hannah searched with the glasses and found more smoke on the seaward horizon, studied it and then passed the glasses to Sarah and asked, uncertain of what she saw, "Two ships?"

Sarah watched and waited and then agreed, "That's right. They're well up over the horizon now."

Hannah said, "They have to be British cruisers, *Ajax* and another." She laughed breathlessly. "Looks like I got my story. We're right in the middle of a naval battle."

She was still making notes in the dusk, by which time the captain ordered them off the bridge. They stood on the upper deck with the other passengers, all aware of their danger now, all wearing lifejackets The liner's boats were swung out, ready to abandon her if she came under fire.

The captain of the *Formose* had taken her as close inshore as he dared to keep her out of the way of the pocket

battleship, but they saw her pass them and surge ahead with her ten knots advantage in speed. Her guns did not swing towards them. Soon afterwards she fired again at the distant cruisers. This time the flashes flared brilliant orange in the failing light and they heard the shrieking roar as the shells passed overhead.

The sun went down and for a time *Graf Spee* was cut in black outline against the red afterglow. Sarah, peering through the glasses, shouted excitedly, "She's been hit!" And Hannah saw the sprouting flame as the shells of the cruisers burst on the battleship. Then the silhouette blurred as darkness closed in and she drew still further away from the liner. For a few seconds longer they held her in the glasses, then they lost her.

They listened and watched but they heard no more firing, saw no more long licks of flame. Sarah said, uncertain now, "I'm sure she was hit."

"I reckon so, too." Hannah put the glasses away in their case and leaned on the rail beside Sarah. "She was running and heading for Montevideo, I guess. So she must have been hurt."

They were still there at the rail after midnight when the *Formose* entered the harbour of Montevideo. The pocket battleship was already moored out in the stream and they stared at the scars of battle that pock-marked her superstructure and hull. Hannah said softly, "She's been hurt all right." Then she read the name on the stern, *Graf Spee*.

A young American, Mike Fowler, had set up a makeshift radio station in a little bar on the beach and was broadcasting the news of the battle to the world. Gustav Moehle, captain of *Brandenburg*, listened to the radio in the wardroom of his ship with his officers gathered around him. He heard Mike's excited account of the arrival of *Graf Spee* in Montevideo and his description of her injuries as they appeared to him.

Moehle could read between and behind the lines because he knew *Graf Spee* and the men in her. He interpreted, voice deep, "She's been mauled. Langsdorff would never have taken her in if she wasn't damaged." He thought for a

moment while the officers waited on him, silent. He said, "She'll need help when she comes out again. I told you all earlier today that the damage done to our bow when *Whitby* rammed us had to be made good before we attempted a crossing of the Atlantic. Well, we can't help *Graf Spee* with a hole in our bow that cuts our speed down below twenty knots. We would only slow her down. So those repairs are doubly urgent now."

Kurt Larsen was among the officers and felt the excitement and determination that gripped them all. Some of them were former merchant marine officers, men who had sailed all the shipping lanes before the war and knew the ports and the coastal waters. They were carried aboard because of that encyclopaedic knowledge, valuable to a raider like *Brandenburg*.

Moehle turned to these now while continuing to address the wardroom at large: "These gentlemen have told me where the work can be done and we are on a course to take us there. This ship will be fully efficient and waiting off the estuary of the Plate when *Graf Spee* comes out. She will not be left to fight alone."

They cheered him.

10

The River

Smith strode back and forth along his allotted strip of deck, jacket discarded in the heat of the morning sun. He had spent his first night aboard *Brandenburg* comfortably enough. His gaolers had hard looks for the man who had rammed and crippled their ship but he had been well fed. He and the other two prisoners had been brought up onto *Brandenburg*'s deck for exercise the previous evening and now again this morning. It seemed it would be a set routine. Buckley and Véronique Duclos paced their own beats some twenty or thirty yards further aft. Smith was still kept separated from them.

Their guards stood between, to keep them apart and to make supervision simpler. The *Leutnant* with his holstered pistol on his belt was taller than Kurt Larsen but younger. He watched Smith while the seaman carrying a carbine slung over one shoulder yawned away the time keeping a bored eye on Buckley and the girl. He obviously considered his duty a formality, how could a prisoner escape from a ship of war a hundred miles from any land?

The *Leutnant* was more alert – or on edge. Smith judged the young man to be worried not so much about the possibility of an escape but of making the slightest mistake in his execution of this novel and unrehearsed task. He had never guarded prisoners before, let alone a captain who was a suspected spy. But he prevented Smith speaking to Buckley. So Smith could make his plans for escape but could not communicate them.

Buckley was communicating. Smith could see him grinning down at the girl and her shy smile. The sound of her laughter came to Smith on the wind. He thought that, of course, she liked Buckley. He was a good man. And his

devotion to Smith had brought Buckley to this pass. Nobody could have called him back into the Navy. He had volunteered.

Smith looked about him as he strode out, turned on his heel, stretched his legs in that rapid pacing again. Moehle had said *Brandenburg* would soon return to Germany but at the moment she was heading south. The other, *Lemvig*, was not in company this morning, had left in the night. Probably to meet *Brandenburg* later for refuelling the cruiser at some prearranged rendezvous.

He glanced at the sea sliding past either side of the cruiser's bow. Moehle had rigged a patch over the damage there and Smith could glimpse the work done when he reached one end of his beat. It looked to be a seamanlike job and would be effective enough for cruising purposes. Even with that gash along her bow *Brandenburg* would be capable of close to twenty knots. Yet she was barely making ten. Why?

And where was the raider bound? Buckley had been right and her engineers would not repair her damage at sea, not to render her fit for a winter crossing of the North Atlantic. So Smith believed she was headed for some neutral port for her repairs. That could mean the end of *Brandenburg*. As soon as she berthed her presence would be reported and the Royal Navy's hunting groups would close in on her. She might well get clear of the port with her bow as good as new before the British ships got there, but they would be close behind her and snapping at her heels. The area of search for this raider, at least, would be narrowed down to a relatively small area of the ocean, not spread across its thirty million square miles.

Yet Moehle was not perturbed. Smith could see him up on the bridge now, smiling and joking with Brunner, the Executive Officer. An act? Smith grinned, remembering times when he had affected unconcern though he faced disaster. Publicly beating the breast was not good for a crew's morale. Moehle might well be putting on an act. Still . . .

The *Leutnant* lifted his wrist and frowned at his watch, waited until the second hand ticked around and was upright

at the exact time, then called an order to the sentry. The morning's exercise was over. Smith swung on his heel to accompany the *Leutnant*, glanced up at the bridge again and this time saw Kurt Larsen looking down at him. Smith wondered why the *Oberleutnant* had been outside the house in Berlin the night it had burned? And he wondered again where his daughter was and whether she was alive? And when would he see his son, if ever? He might face a firing squad soon.

He thrust those thoughts away as the *Leutnant* stood aside at the door leading below. Smith passed through and began the descent of the steep and narrow steel stairs. Part-way down his foot slipped and he fell the last three feet to the deck. He lay there for a moment, under the fire extinguisher that hung in its clips on the bulkhead. Then he rose stiffly, a hand clapped to one leg, as the *Leutnant* ran down the ladder and jumped the last few treads to land lightly at Smith's side. Smith swore and grumbled, "Long time since I was at sea. I'm not used to these ladders."

The young man nodded, understanding; he had been given the duty because of his knowledge of English. Smith hobbled on and Buckley, now at the foot of the ladder, called, "Are you all right, sir?"

Smith growled that he was then his door closed behind him. His leg was genuinely bruised but he thought that had gone well enough. He did not know if it would serve any purpose but you had to start somewhere.

On that morning after the battle Hannah and Sarah disembarked from the *Formose* and moved into two rooms in a hotel near the harbour, "Because – " said Hannah firmly, " – that's where the action will be." Then she went with Sarah to the British Consulate in the Bolsa de Comercio building and asked when the SS *Whitby* was due to dock. They were referred to the Shipping Advisory Department on the top floor. There they were told, "*Whitby*? Let's see . . . No, her agents say she's due on the fifteenth – tomorrow."

Outside on the landing again, Sarah asked, "So what do we do now?"

Hannah was in no doubt: "And I thought you had the makings of a newspaperwoman! Now we work and make that editor of mine eat his words – and pay up!"

They went down to the Consulate on the floors below, then to the German Embassy and from there to the Uruguayan Ministries of Foreign Affairs and for Defence. Lastly they went down to the harbour to stand in the crowds on the quayside and stare out at the steel monster lying offshore.

Hannah had brought her binoculars and she peered through them at *Graf Spee*. "She's pretty chewed up. Holes in her topsides, one in her bow. Here, take a look." She passed the glasses to Sarah.

The girl murmured, "I see what you mean." Hannah glanced idly around her and saw a bar further along the riverside. Then Sarah asked, "What are they doing? Unloading something?"

Hannah frowned and took the glasses. The crane aboard *Graf Spee* was swinging out what looked like crates to lower them to a tender alongside. Hannah re-focused the glasses and now the image came up sharp and clear. She saw the flags draping the 'crates' and said quietly, "Those are coffins."

They counted them, unwillingly, thirty-six. Hannah lowered the glasses and turned away. "Come on. I want a drink."

She led the way to the bar: 'Manolo's'. She did not get a drink. A young man sat in a chair perched on top of a table outside the bar. That way he could see over the heads of the passing sightseers. He held a microphone in one hand and was speaking into it: "... are bringing their dead ashore and I have counted thirty-six coffins so far."

He paused there and Hannah jerked at his trouser leg and said, "Hi!"

He looked down at her: "Hello!"

"Hannah Fitzsimmons." She held out her hand.

He changed the microphone to his other hand, then shook hers: "Mike Fowler."

"Are you NBC or what?"

Fowler grinned, "I'm down here to record birdsong for a

meat-packing company back in Chicago."

"You're kidding!"

"Want to bet?"

Hannah pointed to the microphone, "So is that real? And if it's real, is it just local?"

Mike Fowler said happily, "It's real, lady, and I've got a hook-up with the States that's going out worldwide."

"Wow!" Hannah reached up to slap his back, "Congratulations!" And to Sarah, "Let's go."

She hurried away and Sarah chased after her: "I thought you wanted a drink?"

Hannah said grimly, "I did. But that guy is giving a blow-by-blow account. My editors in New York and London will be listening to it and wondering, 'Where the hell is that Fitzsimmons dame?' So the sooner I get some copy on the record the better I'll like it. We'll drink as we go."

So she dictated, roaming about her hotel room with a dry Martini as Sarah pounded away at the portable typewriter: " . . . British diplomats here are urging Uruguay to enforce the twenty-four hours rule under Articles 12, 14 and 17 of the Hague Convention of 1907, that *Graf Spee* should sail by eight p m (local time) today, twenty-four hours after entering the port. German consular officials, on the other hand, are also making representations and so far the Uruguayan authorities have stated *Graf Spee* can stay pending the report of a Uruguayan team sent aboard her to assess the extent of her damage It is understood the two British cruisers, *Ajax* and *Achilles*, are patrolling outside and it is strongly rumoured that heavier forces in the way of capital ships are close by, just waiting for the German pocket battleship to come out."

She paused there because Sarah had stopped typing, was looking up at her. Sarah's father was in a ship due to pass through those waters where another battle was to take place. *Graf Spee* had suffered thirty-six dead and an unknown number of wounded. It was reported that *Exeter* had been badly mauled in yesterday's action. How many were killed aboard her? How many might die tomorrow?

Hannah guessed at the girl's thoughts that matched her own and said softly, "Don't worry. He'll be all right. I guess

he's pretty close now."

Further north the weather was worsening but this suited Moehle and *Brandenburg*. Rain lashed against the bridge screen as the sun sank, hidden behind a low, leaden overcast. *Brandenburg* slowly closed the land that was lost in the murk with visibility down to a half mile. Only a sprinkling of specks of light showed where a village or town stood.

Kurt Larsen reported to his captain on the bridge and Moehle swung around on his high chair. "I want you to put Goetz ashore." He nodded at the other man at his side, one of the merchant officers shipped for this raiding cruise because of their knowledge of the shipping lanes and ports. Goetz was into his fifties, a tubby, waddling man who had been mate of a freighter plying from Hamburg to this coast for the ten years prior to the war. He wore a non-regulation oilskin, open to show a darned blue sweater and checked serge trousers beneath. His round, red face split to show tobacco stained teeth as he grinned at Kurt.

Moehle went on, "The river is ten miles wide at its mouth but there is only the one small port on its southern shore. Goetz will show you where he wants to be landed. He knows where to find a trustworthy pilot in the town. He says we have a lot of friends there but we may have some enemies too, so I want you to escort him, unobtrusively, every step of the way. You'll wear civilian clothes, of course. Understood?"

An hour later Kurt, in raincoat and borrowed slouch hat, stood in the sternsheets of the launch as it closed the shore. The darkness was total here at the mouth of the estuary in the rain and the night. Further into the river the lights of the town showed yellow but the bow of the launch clove a black sea and drove in towards a thin white line of breaking surf.

But Goetz seemed to know the place. He muttered, "It's about here. This will do."

The surf was close now and the *Bootsmannsmaat* threw out the clutch. The launch slid into the surf with the way on her, motor idling. Then the two seamen in the bow jumped down into the river to stand with water washing about their thighs as they hauled the launch further up the shore.

Kurt told the *Bootsmannsmaat*, "Wait here for us. We should be back in two hours at most." He glanced at Goetz who nodded definitely. Kurt finished, "If we aren't here by then, go back to the ship and report." He thought, Because something will have gone badly wrong. He remembered when he had landed in Spain with the super-confident Fritsch. What a balls-up that had been!

He walked up the beach with Goetz and then through tussocky grass until they came to a path that pointed towards the lights of the town. Soon they were on a dirt road, wide and wet but solid under a thin skin of mud, the crushed rock beneath hard-packed. So they soon came to the town and Goetz said, "He lives down by the harbour." He was talking of the pilot and now he led Kurt through side-streets and alleys. The former merchant officer muttered in explanation, "Can't be too careful, I suppose. The fewer people who see us, the better."

The river was in sight once again, lights reflecting from its black, oily flow, when they passed a bar. Its doors and windows were shut tight against the rain but Kurt could hear singing in his own tongue. Goetz jerked his head towards it, "Some of the boys." He grinned, "Fancy a drink? It's good German beer."

But they kept on until they came to a small, single-storeyed house almost on the quay. When Goetz knocked on the door it was opened by the pilot's wife, small and lively, smiling and calling, "Hans! Gentlemen to see you on business!" She ushered them into the front room of the house, painfully neat and clean, unused except by visitors

Hans found them there and gaped at Goetz, "I thought you would be in Germany!"

"I was." Goetz roared with laughter, "But now I am here. Can you do a job?"

He explained what he wanted and Hans, barrel-chested and thick-legged, brown-faced, said seriously, "It is a bad night."

But Goetz countered, "For us, it is a good one. Can you do it?"

Hans shrugged, "Of course."

Ten minutes later the three were on their way to the

launch, the pilot clutching a small attaché case. His wife had packed it with a change of clothing, a Thermos and sandwiches. She had complained, "What a night to have to work. But needs must " She had kissed Hans like any other wife seeing her husband off to his toil Goetz had winked at Kurt behind her back. Hans had told her the two were from an American merchantman in the estuary. She was ignorant of the presence of *Brandenburg* out there in the night.

As they turned away from the river into the streets of the town Kurt saw, fifty yards away, a motorised barge or lighter casting off from the quay Two men stood on her deck aft, bathed in the yellow glow from a light on the top of her wheelhouse. One of them sheltered from the rain under an umbrella and in his other hand carried what looked like a Gladstone bag A third man, head and shoulders taller than the others, trotted along the quay and threw first the bow line, then that securing the stern, inboard Then he jumped from the quay to land lightly on the barge's deck with all the agility of youth. The light on top of the wheelhouse blinked out then and only her red and green navigation lamps showed on the black shadow of her low, boxy hull. She eased out from the shelter of the breakwater, rose and fell to the rollers marching in from the sea.

Kurt strode after Goetz, leading the way with Hans. *Brandenburg* had her pilot but Kurt Larsen was uneasy.

It was midnight and Smith had thought he was locked in for the night but then the sentry unlocked the door to the cabin and flung it open. The young *Leutnant* stepped in over the coaming and said, "Orders of the *Kapitan*. Exercise now. Walk much. Maybe no more for two days." He tossed an oilskin and hat to Smith, who dragged them on and started up the ladder, the *Leutnant* at his heels At the first turn Smith glanced behind him and below. He saw Buckley and the French girl, both also clad in oilskins and coming up the ladder with the sentry behind them. The girl wisely wore her trousers again, the legs of them showing beneath the enveloping oilskin.

Then Smith was out on the deck in the black night and driving rain. He heard Buckley's deep rumble: "Who'd be a

sailor on a night like this!" Smith strode out along his accustomed strip of deck and the young officer walked with him. He could not stand and watch Smith as he usually did; in a dozen strides he would have been lost in the night.

Again, Smith peered about him from under the brim of the hat. The deck appeared to be empty but for the escorts and their prisoners. No lights showed aboard *Brandenburg* as she cruised slowly. It was difficult to tell in the night but Smith thought she was barely making steerage way. Or enough to keep station? There were lights to be seen over the bow, a distant rash of them that coalesced into a ribbon at the centre. How far? It was difficult to estimate because there was no horizon, dark sea blending into dark sky. Five miles away?

But a port! Smith called up his recollection of the chart as he had studied it on *Whitby*'s bridge thirty-six hours before. What speed had *Brandenburg* made while running south since then? That morning he had estimated not more than ten. Now he knew the reason for her slow speed: Moehle had wanted to arrive here at nightfall, not before. And knowing the distance run, Smith thought he also knew which port was marked by those lights over the bow.

Did Moehle hope to have his repairs carried out here? And planned to enter at night so *Brandenburg*'s presence would not be public knowledge until the next day? That way he might gain a few more hours of secrecy before the cruiser's position was trumpeted abroad, but Smith thought Moehle was being wildly optimistic. You could not take a warship of this size into a small port, even at night, without the news flying through the town.

He was warm inside the oilskin and realised he was setting a rapid pace in time with his thoughts, excitement building in him. And hope. In a neutral port Moehle would have to release his prisoners. Then he recalled the words of the young officer at his side: "No more exercise for two days." They shattered his hopes. It was clear Moehle intended to deny he held any prisoners and to keep them under lock and key while he was in the port.

The *Leutnant* said, "Come. Exercise over." As Smith turned to follow him he heard the steady beat of the cruiser's

engines slow, then stop. The waist of the ship was filling with men on the port side and he saw a launch bucket out of the night and swing in towards that side. Then the young officer was standing aside for Smith to precede him down the ladders.

Smith caught a glimpse of Buckley and the French girl coming towards him, she grappling with the voluminous folds of the oilskin wrapping itself around her legs and threatening to trip her. Then he was inside the door with the thrum of the fans around him and his heart thumping. As he picked his way carefully down the first flight he thought: There might be a better chance later. This is too risky. But then: There may not be another chance at all. So *now*. If everything went well . . .

It did not.

He walked along the short passage then turned at the head of the next ladder. Looking back he saw the *Leutnant* at the far end of the passage, following him. Buckley, Véronique Duclos and the sentry bringing up the rear, were not in his sight, still on the first ladder. Smith passed out of the *Leutnant*'s sight as he left the passage and started down the next flight. Halfway down he slipped and fell as he had that morning and the evening before. His yell of shock was cut short as he came to rest some six feet from the foot of the ladder. And he heard a shriek from above him.

He lay still, tense, peering back up the ladder out of half-closed eyes. He had expected the *Leutnant* to come hurrying to his assistance, worried about his precious prisoner, when Smith planned to grab his legs and throw him to the bottom of the ladder. But the *Leutnant* did not appear. That shriek had come from the French girl. She had had some mishap and he had gone hurrying back along the passage to see to her.

Smith swore, scrambled down the last steps to the flat at the bottom and snatched the fire extinguisher from its clips. He had to have a weapon. He ran back up the ladder, realising with increasing rage that he was slower now than in his youth, and he had just reached the head of the flight when the *Leutnant* appeared from the passage.

He took the force of Smith's impetus, the fire extinguisher

slamming into him below the belt and he collapsed on his back, hands clasping his middle, mouth gaping silently, winded. Smith grabbed at the holstered pistol on the *Leutnant*'s belt and the young officer tried to shove his hands away but Smith tore the pistol free. He pointed it at the prostrate man then Véronique Duclos and Buckley showed at the foot of the first ladder. He saw them halt as they took in the *Leutnant* sprawling on the deck – and Smith's pistol. He ran towards them, gesturing to them to pass by him, then as the sentry appeared behind them Smith thrust the pistol into his face.

Barely a minute later the sentry and his officer were in the cabins and all three doors were locked. Smith, Buckley and the French girl had taken down the lifejackets from their hooks outside the cabins and put them on over their oilskins. Smith stuffed the *Leutnant*'s torch into the top of his lifejacket. They ran up the ladders until they stood at the steel door leading to the deck.

Smith had learned that Véronique had tripped over the oilskin and fallen on the first ladder as he had suspected. He had only told her, "We're going to escape. You don't want to go to Germany." She had shaken her head and that had sufficed to bring her this far. Now Smith explained, "We'll have to swim. That's why we have the lifejackets." The girl only licked her lips nervously, then nodded. She had obviously worked that out. Smith went on, "We must keep to the starboard side, this side. On the other there will be men hoisting in the boat." He hoped there would be none on this side, but that was unlikely. They were lucky not to have met anyone so far.

Buckley put in, "I've got a line, sir. So we won't have to jump."

Smith did not ask where he had got it; Buckley had obviously been doing some planning of his own. Smith opened the door and the light inside was switched off. He passed through and the others followed him. *Brandenburg* was still stopped, rolling gently to the swell. The waist still swarmed with men on the port side and he saw the launch appear above the rail, swinging from the jib of the crane. There were some men on this starboard side but he saw

them only as black silhouettes against the darkness. He and the other two would look the same, clothed in the anonymity of the night. Even the French girl was just a baggy oilskin made corpulent by the lifejacket, a hat jammed on top of all.

He led the way aft, seeking seclusion and found it in the deeper shadow cast by the aftermost turret. Buckley made fast one end of the line to a stanchion and dropped the rest over the side. Smith said, "You go first." So Buckley swung his legs over the rail then started down the line, hand over hand.

Seconds later Smith felt the line go slack as the weight came off it and he pushed the French girl towards it, put it in her hands. She hesitated for a moment, and Smith thought that well she might, staring down at the heaving, black, foam-flecked sea below. But then she went over the rail and down. Smith followed her and found both paddling near the line.

He gasped at the chill of the water, then raged at Buckley, "Why the hell are you hanging about here!"

Buckley started to answer, "Waiting for you -" But Smith cut him off and at his urging they all struck out together, swimming away from the ship. They were barely in time. They had gone only thirty or forty yards when *Brandenburg* got under way, her propellers thrashing the sea into foam at her stern as she moved ahead. If the swimmers had still been close by her side they would have been drawn into the screws and cut to pieces.

Buckley saw that, and the reason for Smith's anger, and why he had gone last down the line: to give Buckley and the girl the best chance. Buckley wondered if the French girl knew the awful death she had escaped by seconds. He hoped not, for the sake of her peace of mind.

Brandenburg was heading northward and Smith thought that course would take her away from the port on the southern shore and out to the middle of the estuary. Was she looking for some deep-water channel? The dark bulk of the cruiser receded, blended into the night, could be traced only by the white line of her wake, then that was gone and the sea was empty. For the first time he wondered if there were sharks in these waters, then told himself it was now too late

to worry He called to the others and they all started to swim towards the distant lights that they could only see when a wave lifted them, disappeared when they slid down into a trough. They looked to be a long way off.

11

"Who would think to find us here?"

Jake Tyler stood in the wheelhouse of the lighter *Mary Ellen*, peering over the wheel and through the rain-splattered glass. He and Garrity had just ferried the doctor across from the port to the little quarry compound on the northern shore of the river. The doctor was answering a wirelessed emergency call from the quarry's hospital, that only had nursing staff. The *Mary Ellen* had set him ashore on the jetty and then turned around.

Garrity had let Jake take the wheel on the way over because Mike said he had to entertain the doctor in the little saloon below. He did it with a bottle of Scotch. But the doctor had refused to drink more than two stiff ones in case he had to operate, so Mike did most of the drinking. He was still below now on the return passage, entertaining himself. That suited Jake, the wheelhouse roof leaked to drum on his oilskins and its ill fitting rattling door let in whistling draughts but he felt happier having the helm when Garrity had been drinking.

Jake's night vision was good but the glass was a distorting factor and the rain restricted and blurred visibility. Sometimes he could barely see past the covered hold to the bow, and at others he saw only a humped and oily sea through a curtain of rain. He was unconcerned. He was steering a compass course back to the port and in a few minutes would see its lights. He did not have to worry about traffic on the river, another vessel. He reminded himself that only two ships put into this one horse port each month and neither was due. All he had to look out for were the lights . . .

Then he saw it. He thought he saw it. There was an eddy in the wind or a split-second's pause in the downpour and there was the other ship crossing ahead of the *Mary Ellen*.

He assumed it was a ship, out there. He saw no bow, just a lift of superstructure like an apartment block, then a gun turret – a *gun turret*? Then it was gone. There was only the rain driving across ahead of him and running down the windows of the wheelhouse.

Should he call Garrity? To show him – what? And tell Mike he had seen... But he wasn't sure what he had seen. It had come and gone in the blink of an eye. Had he imagined it? Jake hesitated, as the *Mary Ellen* began to buck under him and he thought absently that the sea was rising out here in the middle of the estuary. The lighter butted into it, bow soaring and plunging.

It was some minutes later that he saw the light. At first he thought it was in the town on the southern shore then he realised it was lifting and falling on the surface of the sea. He spun the wheel, altering course towards it and stamped on the deck.

The wheelhouse stood over one end of the saloon and that stamping sounded over Mike Garrity's head like a summoning drum. He came stumbling up through the hatch onto the deck abaft the wheelhouse, a sou'wester jammed on his head and struggling into an oilskin. It flapped and clapped as the wind caught it then he'd made it fast with a length of sail-twine knotted about his waist. He clawed open the wheelhouse door and demanded, "What's going on?"

Jake shouted back at him, "There's somebody floating in the river! See the light? Get forrard with a line and give me the sign when I need to cut the motor."

Garrity ducked out of the wheelhouse, snatched a rope from a cleat by the door and hurried forward along the narrow strip of deck past the hold. He halted in the waist, peering forward into the night, watching the light that was a distinct beam now, not just a dancing glow in the darkness.

Jake watched his crouching figure, threw out the clutch when he saw Garrity's frantically waving arm and hooked a becket around a spoke of the wheel to try to hold the *Mary Ellen* head to sea. He switched on the lamp mounted atop the wheelhouse, normally only used when they loaded or cast off at night, then ran forward to help his captain.

The pool of light cast by the lamp on the wheelhouse

showed a swimmer, a man wearing a lifejacket with a torch jammed in the top of it shedding a jerky beam. Mike Garrity had thrown the line to him and the swimmer was working his arms through the loop on the end of it. His arms came down and the two on the lighter hauled him in.

Smith came over the side streaming water, spitting it, retching. He coughed then wheezed out, "Two more!" He waved a hand behind him at the black sea.

Jake peered out and saw them, shadows on the edge of the pool of light, glimpsed and then briefly lost as they sank in a valley between two of the big rollers coming in from the sea, seen again as they rose. He saw movement and the splash of white water. They were swimming. Garrity had worked the line off the man now sitting up on the deck. Jake seized it and told him, "Get that guy outa the way!" He coiled the line as Mike started to drag the man aft, only to have his hands brushed aside. The man got shakily to his feet and staggered towards the wheelhouse. Mike went with him, saw him safely to the wider deck in the stern and aft of the hold, then hurried back to help Jake.

He found him hauling in the line with another swimmer clutching the end of it. They lifted him aboard, a big man, helping himself but heavy of body and weighted down with clothes and oilskin. Then they cast the line again and pulled in the third. This one was far lighter, slender under the lifejacket and oilskin. Mike herded the two ahead of him to join the first by the wheelhouse and Jake coiled the line as he walked aft, hung it on its cleat.

Mike said, "I'll get 'em below." He slid open the hatch leading to the saloon and cabins then gestured to the dripping survivors to go down.

Jake nodded, "OK, I've got her." He swung up into the wheelhouse, let in the clutch and brought the pitching lighter back on her course and under steerage way again. He wondered who the three were. And where had they come from? A shipwreck? Mike would let him know.

In the saloon, warm from the stove in the little galley just aft of it, Mike Garrity pushed in behind the other three who filled the confined space. He said to their backs, "I'm Mike Garrity and the tall young feller that gave me a hand up

there was Jake Tyler He's my mate and the rest o' the crew for that matter. He's a Yank but a good lad for all that. You're English, though?"

They all turned to face him and Smith answered, "I am."

Garrity said, "Thought so But strip those wet clothes off . . " His voice trailed away then as he stared at Buckley in the light from the lamp hanging from the deckhead.

Smith said, "We'll cheerfully oblige, but we have a lady with us." He gestured open-handed towards Véronique who now pulled off her hat so her hair hung down in rat's tails. Her spectacles had steamed up in the heat of the saloon and she took them off and tried to wipe them on a sodden handkerchief. She was shivering now. Smith went on, "The lady's name is Mamzelle Veronique Duclos. She is French but speaks very good English."

Garrity said, "Ah . . . Yes . . . Well . " He was not looking at any of them now. He pushed past Smith and Buckley with his head bent and mumbled, "The lady can use this " He held open the door of his cabin As the French girl cautiously ventured in he said, "You'll find the bunk comfortable, there's a towel on the rail at the end of it and a clean shirt in the locker that you can wear for sleeping. And here – " He fumbled behind the door of the other cabin, brought out Jake's robe and passed it to the girl, explaining, "I don't have one o' them."

He closed the door on her and held open the door of Jake's cabin for Smith and Buckley. "This is the Mate's Just the one bunk One o' you will have to sleep on the deck."

Smith said impatiently, "We'll be all right out here We won't turn the Mate out of his bunk." He pointed at the leather cushions on the couches running along each side of the table "If you will let me have a towel and a blanket, please?" He was dragging off his wet clothes and called to Garrity as he rummaged in a locker, "Are you master of this lighter?"

Garrity emerged from the locker with towels He had discarded his oilskin and stood in his old boilersuit, the grizzled hair on his bony chest showing at the neck He answered proudly, "I am."

Smith took a towel, tossed one to Buckley, started to dry

himself and explained, "I am an officer in the Royal Navy. We were prisoners aboard a German cruiser and escaped from her at the mouth of the river here. I believe she intends to enter the port to have her bow repaired, may even be there now."

Garrity did not question Smith's claim that he was a naval officer, but "A *cruiser*?" His voice rose in disbelief.

Smith nodded, rubbing at his chest. "*Brandenburg*."

Garrity frowned. "You mean a *real* cruiser? How big a ship are you talking about?"

"Seven, possibly eight thousand tons."

Garrity said definitely, "Then she isn't in the port nor ever will be. There's no dockyard and a ship that size must have a draught of fifteen to twenty feet. There's just a quay and a breakwater and any ship drawing more than eight feet has to lie out in the river and discharge by lighter. I pick up a lot of work that way. Your cruiser won't get her repairs done here." He ducked around into the galley.

Smith, wrapped in a blanket, sat on one end of a couch and revised his theory. He had thought the boat returning to *Brandenburg* had brought a pilot to take her into port. But now? Maybe the boat had just gone in to seek information and the cruiser had now hauled out to sea. He took the mug of coffee Garrity handed him with the words: "Drop o' something in it to get the chill outa you." Smith sipped it and could smell the rum with which it was laced.

Garrity passed a mug to Buckley but kept his head averted. Buckley took the mug but his eyes followed Garrity, puzzled. The master of the *Mary Ellen* passed another mug around the door to the French girl. "Here y'are, Miss. Summat to warm you up."

He turned and Smith said, "All right. She can't be in port but she is in these waters. I need to get ashore as early as possible and pass the word to the consul. Our ships must be informed." He knew Harwood had a squadron of four cruisers on this South American station.

Garrity shook his head. "There ain't a consul. Nearest one is a coupla hundred miles north up the coast. You have to remember this is a big, empty country, big as the USA but with only a third of its population." Jake Tyler had told him

that. He carried on, "Once you get away from the coast you won't find a bleeding soul. And this is only a small place and full o' Germans. Some of them are good lads and we used to get on very friendly, but the war's changed all that o' course. And a lot of them are Nazis. They control the telephone exchange and the radio station so they wouldn't let you get that sort of message out. If you tried they'd just turn you in to the police and you'd be interned. And if the police wanted to get your message out you can bet your life neither the telephones nor the radio would be working."

Internment: Smith hadn't thought of that but of course they would intern him. But – He asked, "Is there a British ship in the river? With wireless?" Such a ship could send his signal, and hide him until she was safely out of Brazilian waters.

But Garrity was shaking his head again. "Only two ships come in here, one to load the iron ore from the quarry across the river but she's not due for another three weeks and she's Brazilian, anyway. The only British ship is the *Sotheby*. She runs down the coast from the States every month, calls here on the way down and again on the way up. She's due on the seventeenth." He broke off to glance at a calendar hung on the bulkhead then went on, "That's in three days' time. She'll be headed north then, back to the States."

Smith swore softly in frustration. He said quietly, "I have to get this message out. This cruiser has been, and will be, sinking British merchantmen. She has to be stopped."

Garrity rubbed at the stubble on his jaw. "Yessir. I see that. Tell you what, I'm loading a cargo in the morning to take over to the quarry. *That's* German owned and they'd never let you use their phone to give this *Brandenburg* away. But they send a truck up the coast every day. You keep quiet about the cruiser and being Navy and you'll be able to get a lift. You can pass the word to the first consul you meet but it'll take you all of a day to get to him in that truck. That's the best I can do, sir. And like I said, if you show your faces ashore they'll run you inside." Garrity sounded nervous but sincere.

Smith wondered if he should put a brave face on it and try to browbeat the police into letting him telephone or send a

radio message? But if he failed and wound up under lock and key then it might be days before the news filtered through to the consul. And Buckley and himself might be interned for the rest of the war. He would have to be content with Garrity's solution. So he reluctantly agreed, "Very well. But I have your word that you won't report our presence to the authorities ashore?"

"Yessir. I won't tell anybody. Now why don't you get a few hours' sleep while the night lasts."

Smith took his advice and stretched out on one of the couches. The delay irked him, but – something else, said or on the edge of his memory, troubled him. And he still believed his original conclusion had been correct. *Brandenburg* would not attempt a crossing of the North Atlantic with that hole in her bow.

As his body relaxed his thoughts drifted, to Moehle and the young *Oberleutnant*, Kurt Larsen. Were they still out there aboard *Brandenburg*, seeking some other port? Logic answered that they were but Smith shook his head slowly in instinctive disagreement. When it ceased moving he was asleep.

Buckley was already snoring on the other couch. Garrity got out the bottle he had opened for the doctor, sat down at the table and drank Scotch deeply from the bottle. When he lowered it he shuddered and wiped his watering eyes. The corners of his mouth stayed turned down and he looked ready to cry. He said miserably, "Just my flaming luck." He fell asleep a half-pint of whisky later.

So Jake Tyler brought the *Mary Ellen* home alone after one quick glance below to see Garrity with his head on his arms on the table, the near-empty bottle cuddled in the triangle formed by head and crooked right arm. Jake was not surprised, that was not the first time.

He brought the lighter alongside the quay, secured her and dropped down the ladder to the saloon below. One of the survivors was missing and presumably was in Garrity's cabin because Jake's was empty. Maybe the guy was injured? But explanations could wait. He stripped off his wet clothes and crawled into his bunk. There had been no opportunity to tell Garrity what he had seen. Or *thought* he

had seen. Should he tell him and risk the taunts if he had been mistaken? A warship? In this river? It would be light soon. He slept.

Goetz said, "I was here in '37." He stood at the back of *Brandenburg*'s bridge with Kurt Larsen. The Executive Officer, Paul Brunner, was a yard in front of them. They could see over his shoulder to the pilot standing by the captain seated in his tall chair. Goetz was silent a moment, remembering, then: "The ship I was in was moored off the port and some of us officers came up here in a launch one afternoon. It was sort of a run ashore, to do some fishing and see the falls. They're about fifteen miles from the mouth of the river. We should be up to them soon."

Kurt Larsen stared out at the wide river, glinting deep blue in the night and veined with white from *Brandenburg*'s bow wave. She was steaming with revolutions for five knots but only making three over the ground and against the current. Kurt said, "And there'll be room for us in the pool below the falls?"

Goetz nodded, "Plenty. And nobody to bother us."

Larsen said uneasily, "I don't like the thought of being stuck fifteen miles up a river in a neutral country."

Goetz laughed, "Don't worry about the Brazilians. I've told you, nobody lives up here. We'll be gone before they can know anything about it down on the coast. And what could they do if they did find out?"

Kurt said, "It just feels like a trap."

Paul Brunner spoke over his shoulder, "In the last war the cruiser *Konigsberg* hid in an African river and made her repairs."

Kurt answered, "Yes, sir, but she didn't get out again. The Royal Navy bottled her up and finally destroyed her."

Brunner turned and grinned at him confidently, "But this isn't the Rufiji delta and nobody, let alone the Royal Navy, knows we are here."

"Your attention, gentlemen, please." Moehle had turned around on his tall chair to speak to them. He looked thoughtfully at Kurt Larsen and said quietly, "We have to support *Graf Spee*. With our speed cut to less than twenty

knots by that hole in our bow we would be more hindrance than help. So we must carry out repairs." His lips twitched in a smile, "And who would think to look for us here?" He paused, still watching Kurt, as if to say that he agreed with the *Oberleutnant* and was explaining why he was taking the risk. When he went on he spoke to Paul Brunner: "The pilot wishes to buoy the entrance to the pool . . ."

Brandenburg anchored fore and aft then her launch was swung out and lowered down to the water. With the pilot in its sternsheets the launch throbbed away upriver and was lost in the darkness.

Kurt Larsen watched it go from the bridge. The evolution of lowering the launch had reminded him of the prisoners. They had escaped while the launch was being winched aboard after bringing off the pilot. The young *Leutnant* in charge of them had been missed from his usual place of duty soon after *Brandenburg* entered the river. The searchers had found him and the sentry in minutes, he had told the story to the captain and Moehle had given him a dressing down.

Moehle had told Kurt drily, "This agent – or naval captain, whatever he is – of yours, appears to be elusive."

Kurt said worriedly, "Do you think he and the others might report us?"

Moehle shook his head, "The pilot says he would be arrested and interned as soon as he set foot ashore and our countrymen would never allow him to advertise our presence."

Kurt had been reassured at the time but now he had doubts. He wondered where Captain Smith was and what he was doing.

The launch returned as the sun, rising but still below the horizon, reddened the sky astern. The pilot came aboard and *Brandenburg* weighed anchor. She got under way again, towing the launch now and edging slowly upstream through the early morning mist that hung like thin smoke above the surface of the water. Kurt could not see the banks of the river.

Brandenburg rounded a bend and the pool came into sight. The river spilled over the edge of a plateau to drop a hundred feet and where the water fell it had scoured a small

lake over the centuries. The river was still wide but the pool was wider. The buoys put down by the men in the launch bobbed bright orange on the current, marking the entrance to the pool. Outside of the buoys the river shelved rapidly, too shallow for *Brandenburg*'s nineteen-foot draught.

Moehle took her in. Kurt had assembled the gang of men who were to work under him and he stood with them in the bow. He saw the marker buoys slide slowly and closely past the ship's sides with only feet to spare; *Brandenburg* was forty-eight feet in the beam. But she went through and when in the pool Moehle turned her, inching her round almost on her axis by use of her screws and rudder, until she faced downstream once more. Then she anchored. It had been a masterly exhibition of ship-handling by Moehle and Kurt applauded it mentally.

As soon as the cruiser's engines stopped the launch set off downstream carrying a crew of seven under the command of an *Obermaat*. The petty officer's orders were to watch for anyone approaching upriver and take them under guard back to the ship. Moehle was taking no chances and setting a sentry on the door behind him.

Now *Brandenburg*'s crew could go to work on her damage and they jumped to it. Kurt and his party began rigging staging over the side where the *Whitby*, with Smith at the wheel, had smashed a long hole in her bow. Then they would remove the makeshift patch that had been rigged at sea. Meanwhile other parties were starting on the long labour of transferring fuel, stores and ammunition from the starboard to the port side. When the ship was listed over far enough for the gash to be clear of the river then another party would begin the work of cutting away the ragged edges of steel plate to make the hole 'clean' for the repair.

Kurt looked up and out only once and saw that the mist had been burned up by the sun. Now he could see the banks of the river, swampland steaming in the heat of the sun, but beyond stood tall timber. It would hide *Brandenburg* from anyone who did not come through the timber to the river-bank. He told himself that Moehle and Brunner were right and their ship was safe here. He was still uneasy.

He wondered about *Graf Spee*. She had been hit, they had

learned that much from the radio, but had made Montevideo under her own steam. He had friends in the *Panzerschiff*. How badly was she hurt?

Hannah and Sarah watched the coffins borne to the cemetery on the shoulders of the German petty officers. The people of Montevideo had turned out in force to watch, in silence, the burial of *Graf Spee*'s dead. Hannah saw to it that she and Sarah were early at the cemetery and so had places at the front of the crowd. There were thirty-seven coffins now because another man had died. They were followed by a middle-aged man in a dark suit and Hans Langsdorff, *Graf Spee*'s captain, who led the procession of mourners and some of his crew, most had been left aboard the pocket battleship, hard at work on the damage she had suffered.

Langsdorff was haggard and Hannah muttered, "He looks like he hasn't slept for a week and has plenty on his mind."

Sarah answered, "He was wounded in the battle. I feel sorry for him." Then she asked, "Who is the civilian?" He stood out among the uniforms.

"Langmann, German Ambassador."

The captain sprinkled earth on the coffins then stood back among the petty officers. When all the other mourners gave the Nazi salute with the raised right arm, he put his hand to his cap in the old naval fashion. Hannah whispered, "See that? I'll bet Langmann didn't like it."

As they walked quickly back to their hotel Hannah said, "And the guy does have plenty on his mind. He's stuck in here and doesn't know what's waiting for him out there." She jerked her thumb towards the sea. Then as she paced her room she dictated to Sarah: "The Uruguayan government have considered a report submitted to them by a team of engineers sent aboard *Graf Spee* to assess her damage. In the light of this they have decreed at noon today that Captain Langsdorff must take his ship to sea by eight p.m. on Sunday the seventeenth, that's two days from now." She was silent, staring out of the window at the ship lying out in the harbour. Then she said softly, "That's a hell of a countdown. I wonder what size of fleet is waiting out there?"

Robert Hurst sat with Donovan at his mess table aboard *Ajax*. On that first evening after the battle, as *Exeter* limped south on her way to the Falklands, she had transferred the two *Ajax* ratings to an oil tanker bound northward to fuel Harwood's squadron. Next day they were back aboard *Ajax*.

They had heard a broadcast by Mike Fowler and knew of the deadline of the seventeenth. More: they also knew what force would meet *Graf Spee* when she came out of Montevideo. There were only *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Cumberland*, now arrived from the Falklands. But she only replaced *Exeter*.

Donovan, bulking beside Hurst, dug an elbow in his ribs and asked, "What do you think?"

Hurst grimaced. "Only three ships and spread thin, stretched right across the estuary, a hundred and twenty miles. Langsdorff could smash through a line like that or even dodge all of them if he sailed at night. If he came on *Ajax* we'd be outranged and outgunned." They were both silent then, remembering the destruction and death wrought on *Exeter*. She had lost fifty-six dead. *Ajax* and *Achilles* had also been mauled and between them buried eleven dead at sea.

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Gustav Moehle spoke to the crew of *Brandenburg*: "We have just received a radio broadcast stating that *Graf Spee* has to sail from Montevideo by 2000 hours on the seventeenth. So repairs to this ship must be completed by 2100 on the sixteenth so we can reach the estuary of the Plate by noon on the following day. That gives us just thirty hours to do the job but you have my confidence."

When his voice ceased to echo from the speakers around the ship his men swore and then cheered. Kurt Larsen grinned. His team were working hard and well, the staging hung over the side, the acetylene cutters burning through the ragged rim of the gash in the steel. He thought, We'll make it. We'll sail by 2100 tomorrow.

Another launch had been hoisted out to carry the pilot back to the mouth of the river. Moehle told him, "I'll be glad of your assistance tomorrow evening. Meantime I would be grateful if you would run downriver. One of my boats is waiting to take you. It must not be seen so it will put you

ashore near the town after nightfall. If those former prisoners of mine get ashore will you please make sure they are held and their mouths kept shut until the day after tomorrow."

The pilot stood to attention before going down to his boat. "I can guarantee that. Rest easy."

Moehle said grimly, "No one will rest easy aboard this ship until she is at sea again!"

12

The Command

Smith woke in the forenoon to shafts of sunlight struggling palely through the curtains Garrity had made out of sailcloth to cover the scuttles along the side of the saloon. He could hear the trampling of feet on the deck. The lighter rocked gently as weight shifted on her and in her. He remembered Garrity saying he would be loading a cargo for the quarry. That would be it being humped aboard now by the stevedores.

Garrity himself sat at the table, his head in his hands. He had said any ship drawing more than eight feet would have to lie out in the river. What else had he said? Before Smith slept he had tried and failed to recall the words that he now felt were important. He started to go through that earlier conversation in his mind.

The door of one of the cabins opened and a very tall, lean young man came out. He had not shaved for several days and wore only a ragged pair of shorts made from old trousers snagged off above the knees. He ran his fingers through a rumpled thatch of thick black hair and nodded at Smith. "Hi! You're the guy who speaks English?"

"Yes."

"Jake Tyler. I'm First Mate and everything else aboard this old bucket." He held out his hand.

"David Smith, Captain, Royal Navy."

Jake's eyes widened. "The hell you are. What happened? Did one of those raiders sink your ship?"

"One of them sank the ship in which we were passengers. And this is Leading Seaman Buckley." He gestured to the big man now sitting up on the couch and running fingers through his hair, then pointed at Garrity's cabin door: "The lady is in there. Mamzelle Duclos is a doctor."

"A lady!" Jake stared at the door, startled, then added, "But a doctor, huh? Ah, well."

Mike Garrity's voice came muffled and pleading from inside his palms, "For Gawd's sake get some coffee."

"OK." Jake nodded at Smith, "Be right with you." He turned into the galley to emerge a minute or so later. He carried a small, brown cardboard box in one hand. He told Garrity, "The coffee's brewing up now." He glanced hopefully at the closed door then ripped open one end of the box with his thumb and took out a radio valve. He muttered, "Hell's own job getting parts for this thing." A radio in a stained and scratched plywood casing was mounted on a shelf on the bulkhead and held there by a rope lashing. Jake undid the rope, turned the set around, took off the b[illegible]k and plugged in the valve. He replaced the set. "Let's see if the darn apparatus works now."

The radio squeaked, whistled and crackled as he turned the tuning dial, giving out snatches of music and voices speaking rapidly in Portuguese. Then Mike Fowler's nasal twang came through: "[illegible] here in the harbour of Montevideo since the evening of Wednesday, 13th December. I'm watching *Graf Spee* now. She shows no sign of getting under way but there has been an announcement by the Uruguayan government. They have decreed that she must sail by eight p.m. on Sunday next. She will have a rough welcome outside. We know the two cruisers, *Ajax* and *Achilles*, are there, a puny force to oppose the great ship before me. But what reinforcements have reached them? There are rumours of battleships and aircraft carriers being out there."

Smith was standing with his head close to the set, blanket held round him like some Indian. Buckley watched him and listened. Both made pictures in their minds of the scenes described by Mike Fowler, pictures drawn from experience.

Smith heard the recapitulation of the battle, the pursuit and how *Graf Spee* sought shelter in the harbour of Montevideo. Harwood's squadron had fought her, pursued her and one of his ships was *Ajax*. Smith's son had been in action, would be again in two days' time when the pocket battleship had to run the gauntlet of the waiting cruisers. If he had survived the first encounter. If he was alive. Smith knew the

horrors of a modern naval battle, had learnt them at first hand.

He forced his mind away from the remembered pictures. *Graf Spee* was more than a match for the two cruisers and she would annihilate either one of them if she caught them singly. And then there was *Brandenburg*. Smith was certain that Moehle wanted her bow repaired to go to the aid of the pocket battleship. And now he recalled the words of Garrity that had eluded him: "This is a big, empty country. Once you get away from the coast you won't find a bleeding soul."

The chattering of the radio had wakened Veronique Duclos and she came out into the saloon wrapped in Jake's old robe that smelt of tar, paint and manila rope. It bagged around her and was a foot too long so she had to hold up the trailing skirt as she walked.

At that moment Jake stepped out from the galley with four mugs of coffee hooked on his long fingers. He froze there for a second, staring at Veronique, then remembered the mugs and gave one each to Smith, Buckley and Garrity. The last he handed to Véronique, at the same time looking her over, first speculatively then with disappointment. She had not found either brush or comb in Garrity's cabin and knew very well how she looked. She met Jake's gaze for a second then looked away.

Jake sighed and shrugged. He saw that Smith stood lost in thought. Now there was music coming from the radio. Jake asked incredulously, "Were you in a battle like that outside of here?"

Smith shook his head and told him of the sinking of the *Whitby* by *Brandenburg*, the escape of himself and the other two. "I thought *Brandenburg* was headed for this port to make her repairs but I understand that's out of the question. But how deep is this river at the middle, and how far upriver would it be navigable for a big ship?" It was just an idea, improbable but not impossible. He could recall an instance –

Jake cleared his throat and said truculently, ready to argue if he was derided, "Listen, and don't let anybody laugh, but last night when we were out there I thought I saw a battleship or a cruiser, *something*, with gun turrets."

Smith asked quickly, "When was this? Where was she

headed?"

"Just a few minutes before we hooked you out of the water. And she was crossing our bow, heading upriver."

Smith said, "She had a hole in her bow that her captain would want repaired. His own engineers could do it if he could list the ship in sheltered water. Would he find those conditions upriver? Is there enough depth of water? Do people live up there who might raise the roof if they saw *Brandenburg*?"

Now Garrity had lifted his head from his hands, was staring at Smith. He said slowly, thinking about it, "There's a deep water channel for all of fifteen miles till you come to the falls. Then there's a pool at the foot of them with plenty of deep water. The country either side is swamp backing onto forest and it's no good for farming or anything else. There's nobody in there except maybe a few Indians."

Jake looked from one to the other. "All right, I know what I think I saw but are you seriously suggesting that a German cruiser has sneaked upriver to mend a hole in her side?"

Smith said, "It's happened before. The *Konigsberg* hid in the Rufiji delta in East Africa in 1914."

And Garrity confirmed, "Ah! I remember that!" Then he saw Buckley watching him and frowning, as if trying to remember . . . Garrity fell silent.

Jake said, "So if you're right and she is up there, are you going to try to get her interned?"

Smith said wryly, "Mr Garrity says I'd be interned myself if I stepped ashore and the Nazi element would keep me locked up until *Brandenburg* got away. Besides, how could she be interned?"

"What do you mean?"

"That cruiser mounts nine 6-inch guns and the police here have what? A motor launch? And the nearest ships of the Brazilian navy are - where? Probably several days' steaming away. So *Brandenburg* can come and go as she pleases and the Brazilians can do nothing about it but complain. Moehle will risk any amount of diplomatic complaints to make his ship fit to fight."

Jake's gaze had drifted away from Smith to rest on the

girl, her eyes cast down over the coffee cup she cradled in her hands. But now he looked back to say bluntly, "OK. If she *is* up there then this guy Moehle has got you over a barrel. There's nothing you can do about it."

"Yes, there is." And when the young American frowned, puzzled, Smith explained, "I could stop him making his repairs, or delay them I think he wants to join *Graf Spee* and help her to get clear I could stop that."

"You mean go up there and throw a spanner in the works? But you just said this cruiser was too tough for the police to handle so how would you do it?"

Smith said, "First I'll have to find her." He looked at Garrity. "I need this lighter, and you "

Garrity gaped at him, then said, "Me?"

Jake stared suspiciously, thinking quickly, then scowled, "You mean us? Well you can count me out, Captain I'm a neutral " He turned on Garrity, "And if you'll take my advice you'll keep out of it This guy is planning to take on that damn great cruiser What you have here is a twenty-year old, six knot lighter and one Lee Enfield rifle that's even older. Those are rough odds, Mike. The Captain has to do his job, sure, but you don't have to stick your neck out. Leave it be."

He reached into his cabin and brought out a shirt, pulled it over his head and tucked it into his shorts. He picked up a pair of old canvas shoes with rope soles and headed for the ladder to the deck "I have to go to town I'm expecting a letter " He pointed a finger at Garrity, "But you think over what I said."

But Garrity could stand Buckley's wondering stare no longer He said, "Hold on, I'll come with you " And added as a vague excuse, "Some people I have to see " He waved a hand at Smith "We'll be back around noon Our cargo for the quarry will be loaded by then and I'll take you across the river like I said " He fled up the ladder

Jake glanced once more, furtively, at the girl His robe was short of buttons so that she clutched its baggy folds at the neck Her face behind the big spectacles was bare of make-up and her hair hung lank about it. Jake shook his head and followed Garrity up the ladder.

Veronique watched him go with a cold eye, remembering the way he had looked at her, his disappointment plain to see. Well, she did not like his beachcomber dress and stubbled jaw. He was not a gentleman.

As they walked up the dirt road from the quay Jake pressed his argument: "This is a European war so let the Europeans get on with it. Listen, Mike, my old man went to France in 1918 when we got involved in the last war. He never came back. I was only a coupla months old when he was killed fighting somebody else's war."

Garrity squinted up at him against the glare of the morning sun. "I thought you said your Mam and Dad lived in the States."

"Mom married again just a few years back. He's a regular guy but he wanted to organise my life. I wouldn't hold still for that. As of now I don't know what I want to do with it, but it's going to be my decision. And listen, Mike, so you're not a neutral, but you aren't a belligerent either. You're in nobody's army or navy. Like I said back there, this is Smith's job. But you're a *civilian*, right?"

Garrity said unhappily, "I want a drink." He turned away towards the open door of a bar and the cool emptiness within.

Jake called, "I'll have one with you on my way back." He saw Garrity lift a hand in acknowledgment.

Jake walked on to the post office and asked for his mail. The clerk handed him the familiar stiff envelope and Jake kissed it, opened it and saw the cheque inside. The clerk said, "A moment . . ." He dived into the gloom of the back office and returned with a cablegram. "This arrived only this morning. I was going to send it down if you did not come in."

Jake took it, "OK. Thanks." And wondered who the heck was sending him cables. He slit the buff envelope with his thumb and took out the form, read it. Then he read it again. And a third time. He knew it by heart then, folded it and put it carefully in the pocket of his shirt. The cable had asked for a reply but he wasn't ready to reply so the hell with it. He had not been ready for the cable. Oh, Christ.

He started back for the *Mary Ellen*, walking a familiar

route automatically while a mix of emotions, grief, anger, pain, outrage, hatred, boiled up inside him. So he did not hear the commotion until he was level with the bar. Then the scuffling and cursing brought him back to the present. He looked into the shaded dimness and saw Mike Garrity being wrestled back against the bar by Otto Bergmann's two henchmen, one grappling each skinny arm. Otto himself stood in front, pulled back his hamlike fist and measured the distance then let it go. The punch half-missed because Mike lunged to one side so he took the blow on the side of his head and not full in the face. Otto swore and demanded, "Hold him still!" Then he pulled back his fist again.

Jake stepped up behind him, grabbed the fist, twisted, yanked, then smashed his own clenched fist down on the elbow and broke the arm there. They all heard it and Otto screamed. Jake hit one of the other two while he was still holding on to Garrity and so was open to the punch. He fell back against the bar and then down on his knees. The third man let go of Garrity in time to grab a bottle but not to avoid the kick Jake planted between his legs.

Garrity wiped at his face with a shaking hand and looked down at them then his eyes lifted to Jake and he said, "I'm sorry. It was my fault. They started on at me again and I lost me rag and told them what I thought of their bloody Hitler."

Jake said, "That's all right. Come on."

They walked back to the *Mary Ellen* and found her loading completed and the chief stevedore waiting with the manifest. They checked it together then Garrity signed one copy for the chief, who took it and left. Jake then slid back the hatchcover and he and Garrity descended the ladder to the saloon. They found the other three now dressed, their clothes badly creased but dry. The girl sat on one of the leather couches at the table and Jake could see her legs under it, clothed in the light blue cotton trousers in which she had left the *Whitby*. Buckley stood on one side of the saloon, Smith on the other, one hand in the pocket of his jacket. Jake wondered absently why he wore the jacket; the inside of the saloon was heating up as the sun burned the deck overhead.

Jake told Smith, "I've changed my mind." His voice was

toneless. "I had a cable." He pulled it half out of his shirt pocket then pushed it back. He saw no need to read out the details of how the executors of his parents had searched for him and finally traced him through the Boston bank which held his money and sent his cheques. Or their statement that he was the sole heir and the request that he contact them as soon as possible. That could wait. He told the four crowded in the saloon the part that mattered. "Some German sub torpedoed a liner called the *Athena*. My mother and stepfather were on it. They weren't among the survivors. So I'll beg or borrow a boat from somewhere to take you upriver."

Garrity said softly, "I'm sorry, lad."

Jake shrugged, "Thanks. There's no reason for you to get involved but maybe you'll sell us the rifle and some shells."

Garrity cleared his throat and addressed Smith, "Well, I've been thinking it over, and all things considered I think I should take you to look for this cruiser and try to hold her up."

Buckley said, "We'll be able to talk over old times."

One corner of Garrity's mouth went up then drooped sadly again. "I thought you'd remember before long." He told Jake, "I knew this feller back in 1917 –" he nodded at Buckley, "– when we were both in the Navy. But after the war, well, in 1922 I jumped ship in Rio because I had another two years to serve and I couldn't stick the discipline any longer. I'm a deserter. Now they'll claim me back from here and it'll be the bloody cells for me." He rubbed two-handed at his face then looked hopefully at Smith. "Unless maybe, I can get a good mark or two on my record." Jake thought that this explained Garrity's sudden patriotism, he was still Navy at heart.

Garrity continued, "But I'm not looking forward to this. If that cruiser is hiding upriver–" His voice tailed off and he shuddered at his thoughts.

Smith said, "None of us are looking forward to it." He glanced at Veronique Duclos and asked, "Have you reached a decision?"

She hesitated. This captain with the cold blue eyes and sudden quick smile had told her he was determined to hunt for the German cruiser. Veronique could hold her tongue

and travel north to the nearest French consul but he would prefer she went along in the *Mary Ellen*.

She looked up at Smith. "Why do you want me?"

He said, "You're a doctor. You could be very useful."

She took that in, with its implications of danger and injury, as they all did. She remembered the train crash and saw her duty clearly again: "I see. Then I think I should go with you."

Garrity said, "We'll get under way." He climbed the ladder and Jake followed him.

Smith and Buckley exchanged glances and Smith took his hands out of his pockets. The pistol he had taken from the young *Leutnant* still made a bulge in the right side of his jacket but he would not have to press Garrity and Jake into service at pistol-point.

They sailed at noon and turned upriver when out of sight of the port. Smith had written on a sheet torn from his notebook, wrinkled as it had dried, a formal order requisitioning the lighter for service in the Royal Navy. He did not know if that was legal or whether he was now a pirate but the order was now in Garrity's pocket.

Smith told himself wryly that now he had a command. He was captain of the *Mary Ellen*. With a deserter, a neutral and a French girl for crew — and Buckley, thank God! He laughed and they wondered why. He could not tell them.

13

The Hunt

The *Mary Ellen* dug her snub nose into the current for the next four hours. Garrity took the helm first and the rest of them sat on the deck by the wheelhouse, glad to be out of the airless cabin. Jake rigged a green canvas awning, spread on steel supports, over the after deck but they still sweltered in its shade.

When Jake relieved Garrity at the wheel Mike went below to the galley and cooked a meal of hash for all five of them. At the end of it the French girl said, "I think we should all help in some way. I will cook if you like." No one objected.

Veronique, dark hair tied back with a twist of cord, wore a shirt borrowed from Garrity because her blouse was torn. He kept them for cold weather and the rest of the time settled for a singlet. The garment swathing Veronique was wool, thick and rough, hot and uncomfortable. Jake, bare-chested, thought, Poor kid. And when she passed him he said gruffly, "Hey! You'll find some cotton shirts in the bottom drawer under my bunk. Help yourself."

She paused a moment, startled, then murmured, "Thank you." And moved on quickly. But soon she appeared in one of his shirts and smiled her thanks again.

Smith, jacket discarded and his shirtsleeves rolled up to the elbows now, had Garrity take Buckley and himself over the lighter. They traversed the hundred foot, black painted, steel-plate length of her from the canoe carried upside down in her bow to the little dinghy resting on chocks in her stern. They stopped in the waist, her widest point where she was twenty feet in the beam, and peered into her hold. Smith asked what was in the cargo intended for the quarry and Garrity reeled off the list, finger pointing out each item in the open hold: "Cement, timber, diesel oil, flour, canned

goods " on and on, then finishing. " . . . and under the tarpaulin there is the dynamite for blasting, the fuse and all that stuff." Smith nodded.

They all sweated and watched the shore creep by on either hand. First there was the belt of low undergrowth in the foreground, stunted trees growing into and out of the river that curled brown with mud between their twisted trunks. They swept back for distances of a hundred yards or up to a half-mile before blending into the background of the tall timber of the forest on the higher ground. Every now and again there were gaps in the walls of low trees forming the river banks where tributary streams wound out from the forest to join the main current.

Then Smith got to his feet, went prowling about the *Mary Ellen* again and Garrity muttered, "Can't the man rest?"

Soon afterwards he said reluctantly, "Not far now. Another half-hour, maybe."

Smith peered upstream and squinted against the sun glinting off the surface of the river to hurt the eye. He said, "Pull in to the left hand bank and I'll go ashore. Can you lend me a pair of binoculars? I want to see what's around that next bend. You wait until I give you the signal, then come and take me off."

Jake Tyler spun the wheel and the *Mary Ellen* nosed into the trees as he threw out the clutch. Smith dropped over the bow into muddy water that came up to his waist and waded through the trees. He worked upstream until he could see around the curve to the next reach of the river, then he set Mike Garrity's binoculars to his eyes and painstakingly swept the banks on either side. He kept at it, patiently, for some minutes but finally lowered the glasses and waved to Garrity. Then he waded out to the edge of the trees again to climb aboard the lighter as Jake brought her in to him.

From that time on Smith repeated the performance at each bend in the river. Until Garrity said, "After this one there's a straight reach of nearly a mile then we round one last curve and we'll be looking at the pool."

The next bend was a hairpin as the river curled around a long neck of land. Jake found an inlet that led part-way across this neck before the stream turned inland. He steered

the lighter into it as far as that turning then stopped her, nestling among the trunks slimy with weed. Smith dropped over the bow and waded between the tilted, dwarf trees the rest of the way across the neck of land until he opened the next reach. There he stopped in the shelter of the trees and swept the mile length of the reach with the glasses. Then again. And yet again, concentrating now on one patch of shade below overhanging trees a half-mile away on the opposite bank. Because something had moved . . .

After the eye-aching glitter of sunlight on the surface of the river the shade under the trees on that opposite bank was almost black. But at last his eyes pierced the dimness and the boat took shape. The movement had been made by a man sitting on its foredeck before the lift of the cabin. He wore a sailor's white tropical rig and held a rifle or carbine across his knees. The boat was a naval launch.

Smith marked the spot on his mental map then searched the banks of the river again and grunted with satisfaction when he found what he sought, the mouth of an inlet on that opposite bank but short of the pinnace by two hundred yards or more.

He made one last sweep – and froze momentarily, then was up and running. The water reaching above his waist chained his legs and the mud on the river bottom dragged at his feet. He floundered back to the lighter in desperate haste. When he was still a hundred yards away he shouted breathlessly, "Get the awning down! Bring her right in!" He waved his arm furiously, beckoning.

Jake hesitated for a moment, worried about grounding the *Mary Ellen*, but Buckley told him, "Do as he says! Something's gone badly wrong!" And Garnty nodded so Jake let in the clutch and eased the lighter forward until he felt her gently take the ground, when he threw out the clutch again.

Buckley reached over the side to haul Smith in, dripping green water, trailing weed and mud, but he still panted as he came up, "German boat coming downstream! Hang that awning over the stern so it covers us!" He led them in the work, frenziedly manhandling the flapping folds of stiff canvas so the awning hung from the aftermost of its steel supports, but now like a rumpled curtain hiding the *Mary Ellen*

from anyone on the river. . . .

Or so he hoped. He cast one swift glance over the hurried attempt at camouflage and decided it would have to serve. "Everybody get down on the deck because a lot of faces will show white! And movement will catch the eye so *keep still!*" They obeyed him and he followed their example except that he lay propped on his elbows so he could see over the lighter's low bulwark. Somebody had to watch the launch from *Brandenburg*.

He had regained his breath after that squandering of energy in the oven heat of the afternoon, was now able to speak evenly and give them some further explanation. "There's a guardboat stationed on the next reach, starboard side about halfway up, a sentry armed with a rifle aboard her. I saw her, and then another boat came down. There are men on her deck but they shouldn't see us from the river because of the trees."

Jake, stripped to his shorts, shifted uneasily as he lay prostrate on the hot steel deck that burned his body as if he were on a skillet. He did not agree with Smith. He had been able to see over the trees, just, to the river. Then he remembered he was a foot taller than most people and had been standing in the wheelhouse, another foot higher than the deck. But would the wheelhouse be visible from the river?

Smith answered his question, murmuring, "The trees and the awning will only work if the look-outs on that boat aren't really *looking*. If any one of them really searches, concentrates . . ." As he had done when he located the guardboat. He had no need to finish the sentence. And now the launch came into sight.

The river had narrowed to less than a quarter-mile wide here and the launch was running down the middle of it, so was passing only about two hundred yards from the lighter. Because of the way the inlet in which the lighter lay ran upstream and almost parallel to the river, the launch did not appear in Smith's arc of vision until it was astern of the *Mary Ellen*. It showed no sign of turning aside, so it had passed without seeing the lighter behind the stunted trees.

Smith took a breath – then held it. There were several men in the well of the launch, all in tropical white naval

uniforms and two of them at least with rifles slung over their shoulders. One of these turned to glance back. He seemed to look directly at the green square of the awning that hid the lighter, but then his head turned away to face forward again. The launch puttered on, down the river and out of sight.

Aboard the lighter they sat up and Garrity said, "Wonder where it was going?"

Jake answered, "Maybe to meet one of their friends. They have plenty in town."

Garrity nodded agreement. They knew nothing of *Brandenburg*'s pilot, now on his way home.

Jake looked at Smith, "You said the man on the guardboat was armed. What about the launch that just passed us?" And when Smith nodded, Jake said, "Then it's a good job you acted so quick. These guys aren't wanting visitors and they're ready to do something about any who show up." He paused then, while they all looked at Smith, bedraggled with his clothes drying on him, his hair plastered to his skull. But they looked at him with respect now. Jake said, "And it shows *Brandenburg* is up here – sir."

Smith was staring upriver. "Now we have to find her."

And stop her.

Smith set out once again but this time Buckley and Jake, with Garrity's Lee-Enfield rifle slung over his shoulder, went with him. They crossed the river in the *Mary Ellen*'s dinghy, Jake tugging at the oars, and Smith in the sternsheets looked back over his shoulder at the lighter. Jake said, "She's hidden pretty good, huh?"

Smith said, "So long as you're not looking." He knew she was there and could pick out her upperworks where they peeped above the trees. He had told Garrity to cut some branches and spread them over the awning covering the stern. That helped and would conceal her from *Brandenburg*'s launch if it returned from downriver but people moving about her deck would give her away. Garrity and Veronique would be below in the saloon by now, again at Smith's order. But – He said, "We'll hide her better than that once it's dark."

Jake ran the boat deep in among the trees on the opposite shore and they dropped over the side into the river. Smith led them, wading through the shallows of the river at first then trudging on a moist soil inland. They forced their way through the interlocking branches of the low trees and crowding undergrowth. So for almost a half-mile until the ground lifted and they were in the tall timber, when they turned and headed upstream. The noise of the falls was a rumbling, steadily rising undertone now

From this higher ground they could see over the stunted trees and keep the river in sight. The intervening land was laid out like a map below them so that they found the 'inlet' Smith had marked earlier It turned out to be a stream running into the river, with a side channel joining it about four hundred yards from its mouth They proved its depth when they went down to it and waded it with the water up to Smith's chest and Jake said, "It'll take the *Mary Ellen*."

Smith looked at the trees and curtains of glossy leaves and dangling weeds that masked the entrance to the side channel and said, "It will do very well."

They climbed the gentle slope to the forest again and soon passed the guardboat but saw no more of it from this side of the river than Smith had done from the other There was only the dark outline of the boat in the shadow under the trees and the ghostly white figure of the look-out on the foredeck. Smith said, "He has to rely on his eyes " He spoke in a conversational tone; there was no need to whisper. They were a hundred yards or more from the boat but they could have shouted because now the roar of the falls hid any other sound. That was important. The look-out would hear nothing and in the night he would be almost blind.

Smith led them on, doubling back into the trees and climbing more steeply now, then making a long swing to the left heading further upriver before turning once again. The noise of the falls was thunderous now as they descended and they could see above the forest the permanent cloud of spray like mist that marked them. Then they were among the last of the tall trees and there were the falls, the pool and

Jake said huskily, "Oh, *boy*! She's really here! And she's *big*!" This was the ship he had glimpsed in the night. He had

not been dreaming on his feet.

Smith's eyes, like those of the others, went first to *Brandenburg* as all three of them halted and sank down into the undergrowth of scrub. He crouched just above the entrance to the pool and she lay to his right, anchored fore and aft against the thrust of the current, her head pointing downriver. From this angle he could just see around her bow that swarmed with men to the staging hung there and more men working on it with a glare of acetylene cutting torches. She was listed over to port so that the hole in her hull was clear of the water and he nodded a professional respect for the work that had gone into accomplishing that so soon. But Moehle was working to a tight schedule: *Graf Spee* had to sail in just over forty eight hours. So *Brandenburg*, if she was to go to the aid of the pocket battleship, had to be out of here . . . Smith calculated quickly: by midnight of the next day, at the latest.

The falls drew his gaze but their beauty held it only briefly. The sun made rainbows in the perpetual mist hanging over them and bejewelled the crest toppling over the cliff, but Smith saw it only in tactical terms: he could mount no assault from that direction.

The pool was a quarter-mile across and edged by the stunted trees and bushes growing out of it — the pattern of the rest of the river. There was obviously enough deep water for *Brandenburg* to have turned but what about the two buoys anchored below him where the river widened into the pool? Did they mark the deep water of the entrance? And if they did, what could he do? He thought about it for some time but finally decided that he did not have enough knowledge of explosives nor of the river bottom, nor did he have a diver. But if that was the entrance . . .

He shelved the idea for another time, spent some minutes peering through Garrity's binoculars at *Brandenburg*'s bow then turned to start back.

Jake grabbed at the sleeve of his now dirty, torn shirt: "Hey! We have to stop the work down there?" He shrugged the rifle off his shoulder. "I'm a fair shot. If I knock one of those guys over, that'll stop 'em."

Smith shook his head. "No. The only advantage we have

is surprise we know the ship is there but they don't know about us I'm not throwing that away for a delay of an hour at most."

"An hour!" Jake protested, " I could keep 'em off that deck as long as the light lasts!"

Smith repeated, "No They'd blast you out of the forest." He moved deeper into the trees but Jake hesitated, unconvinced and mutinous Then he saw Buckley's shake of the head, and followed.

They rowed back across the river and slid alongside the *Mary Ellen* again in the dusk, filthy with sweat and mud, their clothes torn by the scrub Garrity and Veronique leaned over the lighter's side and Jake called up to them excitedly, "We found her! She's up there in the pool and big as the *Titanic*!" Then he swung the oars of the boat inboard and groused, "But we didn't do a damn thing to stop their guys working on her."

Veronique thought he looked like a sulky schoolboy She called down to the men in the boat, "I have a meal ready "

Smith looked up at the darkening sky then nodded acceptance, "Thank you We'll eat now and then move her "

By the time they had hoisted in the dinghy, washed and eaten it was full dark Smith told Garrity, "Start her up and take her across the river."

Mike questioned, "What about that guardboat in the next reach?"

"The watch aboard her won't hear you because of the noise of the falls."

So they dismantled the awning from over the stern then the *Mary Ellen* eased back, squelching, off the mud of the bottom and out of the narrow channel She swung around and puttered over the dark river to the opposite bank until close to the long shadow of the fringing trees. She turned then at Smith's order and pushed upstream parallel to the shore She moved slowly now, creeping around the outside of the bend in the river, and that, too, was at Smith's order. She would creep to within a quarter-mile of the guardboat and while the watch aboard her would not hear the lighter above the roar of the falls, nor pick out the shape of her, tucked in tight alongside the trees, they might see the white

water of a big bow wave if she moved at full speed There was hardly a ripple at the *Mary Ellen*'s blunt stem.

But Garrity chewed his lip, until Smith said, "Here Take her in and dead slow " He walked forward to stand in the bow as Mike eased the lighter around so that she headed into the gap between the trees Her speed fell away further still as she crept into the inlet. Smith passed his orders via Jake and Buckley in the waist, calling them low voiced, "Starboard a point . midships . . a point to port . "

He was conning the lighter from there, watching the bends and curves of the stream as they loomed up out of the darkness, and recalling what he had seen during his earlier reconnaissance. He took the lighter some four hundred yards up the stream until he found the side channel Then he plunged over the side again with Jake and Buckley, the three of them shoving and hauling to help Garrity as he cajoled the *Mary Ellen*'s broad stern backwards into the side channel Then they eased her up it, stern first, for two hundred winding yards and around two bends So that she finally came to rest with a few inches of water under her flat bottom and her bow pointing down towards the stream

Smith had not finished He led them down to the entrance to the side channel, already half masked by trees Stumbling in the darkness they lashed a rope across it, cut down saplings and bushes and hung them from the rope so the entrance was completely hidden by a seemingly unbroken line of undergrowth Smith reckoned a good quarter-mile of swamp and forest separated the lighter from the guardboat

Buckley stood back from the screen they had made and said, "'Scuse me, sir, but I've just remembered don't they have man eating fish in some o' these rivers?"

Smith said, "Piranha " The thought had come to him some minutes ago He remembered wondering about sharks after dropping into the sea from *Brandenburg* and said now as he had thought then, "But it's a bit late to worry "

Jake said, "Don't There are no piranha, alligators or anything else dangerous in this river Except a helluva big cruiser."

They waded back up the side channel to the *Mary Ellen* and Jake asked, "So what are we going to do about

Brandenburg?"

Smith climbed aboard and asked Garrity, "Can you let me have an oil-drum?"

14

Night Attack

Smith worked into the night. Early on he warned the others aboard the *Mary Ellen*: "If you show a light and the crew of that German launch see it, they'll come in shooting." So he used the green awning from the *Mary Ellen* to make a shelter in which he could use a light without it being seen. The shelter was set among low, twisted trees and a good fifty yards away from the lighter in case something went wrong. Felipe, the one-time shot firer who had set the charges in Spain, had taught Smith something of his craft but he knew he was not an expert.

He dug down into the hold of the lighter and took some of the dynamite and a long length of fuse to the shelter, then detonators and the drum Garrity produced. It was not an oil-drum but a cylindrical paint tin standing over a foot high and nine inches in diameter. Garrity had cut one end out of it. Smith packed it with dynamite by the light of an electric torch, inserted detonator and fuse then lashed a wooden collar around it near the top so the tin would float upright like a buoy. He tied a thin line to it, a hundred feet long, and then carried it down to the side channel.

He found Jake there, knee-deep in the water that flowed out from between the bordering trees and around him. He stood a score of yards or more from the *Mary Ellen*'s bow, with the canoe he had unlashed from the lighter's foredeck and launched in the stream. Jake held on to the canoe and watched as Smith set the paint tin in the stream and let the current carry it away. It bobbed and wobbled but because of the wooden collar showed no sign of turning end over end.

Smith said, "All right." He hauled in on the line, lifted the tin and set it in the bow of the canoe.

Jake said, "The other line's amidships."

Smith groped around in the canoe and found the cord with its lead sinker and the markers fashioned out of strips of cloth or leather. Garrity had made that up, working from memory.

Jake had not just volunteered but insisted: "I can handle this canoe better than anybody. I have to go." Now he tied up the canoe to a tree and said, "It's lucky you know what you're doing with that stuff." He nodded at the makeshift bomb.

Smith said shortly, "I don't know a lot. I'm just remembering what I was told a year or so ago." By the Spanish gipsy, Felipe. "Suppose we keep our fingers crossed."

Jake muttered, "I'll do that." He was wondering uneasily now what lay ahead.

They waded back up the stream to the *Mary Ellen* and Smith said, "We're going now."

Buckley glowered down at him, worried and angry. He had seen Smith set out on this kind of mission too often in the past. Veronique looked worried and frightened. She said, "Good luck." Her eyes were on Jake Tyler. She knew what he was about to do, was impressed by his calm courage but afraid for him. He grinned at her but was not feeling very brave.

Smith told Garrity, "Better get that awning back. It might be a good idea to put it up and fix some other camouflage as well."

"I'll do it first thing tomorrow, soon as it's light."

Smith said, "Now."

Garrity could barely see him in the gloom, though only feet away, but he recognised the tone and answered, "Aye, aye, sir." Then he passed the Lee-Enfield rifle down to Jake and muttered, "You two look out for yourselves."

Jake took the rifle and answered with false confidence, "We will."

Smith led the way back to the canoe and they smeared the white of their faces with mud. Then they climbed cautiously into the canoe as it wobbled under their shifting weights. Jake knelt in the stern with the rifle alongside him, Smith forward with the paint tin in front of him, the lead line just behind. Jake cast off, they picked up the paddles and started

down the side channel, ducked under the rope holding the dangling, covering bushes and entered the stream.

The night was without a moon but speckled with stars. When they came out onto the river they paddled downstream with the current for a short way to get around the bend out of sight of the guardboat. Then they crossed the river and started upstream, hidden in the darkness and lost against the black background of the trees.

When they came to the pool they edged out until they reached the marker buoys set down by *Brandenburg*. They spent close on an hour there, Jake paddling gently to hold the canoe on station while Smith sounded the depth with the lead line, reading it from the markers, felt with his fingers in the night. He found the water deep between the two buoys but shallowing abruptly outside of them.

At length he was satisfied and took up his paddle again. Now they swung out in a wide circle around *Brandenburg* until they were astern of her and close to the foot of the falls. As the river fell a hundred feet to explode in the pool it whipped up a turbulence that set the canoe pitching and rolling, threw up spray that drifted on the breeze so that they moved in a fog. Then they were out of that, paddling gently as the current took them downstream again, and there was the cruiser ahead of them.

She lay in darkness except for her bow where two big arc lamps hung over her side. Their light, and the glare from oxy-acetylene cutters, showed men on the staging just above the waterline using those tools to burn away crumpled plating from the gash in the cruiser's bow. On the deck above them another gang worked around sheerlegs from which a new steel plate dangled on wire hawsers.

Smith took this in as the canoe closed on *Brandenburg*. They slipped in under her towering stern and no sentry shouted an alarm. The glare of the lights forward in the ship had destroyed the night vision of everyone on her deck. Now only Jake was paddling, stroking the canoe down along the steel cliff of the ship's side and within a yard of it. They could hear the hum of the ventilating fans aboard her.

Smith had the paint tin on his knees and the box of matches in one hand, the end of the fuse in the other. He

said, "Hold her here." They were below the cruiser's bridge and about a hundred feet or less from the staging hung over the ship's side. The men working there were lit as on a stage but the canoe was hidden in the outer darkness as Jake stroked steadily to keep it on station.

Smith was about to light the fuse and launch the paint tin when he paused. The oxy-acetylene cutters blinked out and the men using them pushed the masks up from their faces. An officer leaned over the rail above and called down to them.

Kurt Larsen demanded of the cutters, "Have you finished?" They had and he ordered them up. He turned to another party waiting behind him on the deck, "You'll go down when the cutters are all up." They would position the plate, now hanging from the sheerlegs and waiting to be lowered, over the gash in the bow. This plate was the first of two, cut from interior bulkheads by the cruiser's engineers.

The petty officer standing at the rail asked, "Can we start lowering it, sir?"

That would save time, instead of waiting until the two gangs had changed over. Kurt ordered, "Lower away!" He watched as the petty officer lifted a hand, signalling to the man at the winch. It burst into throbbing life and the wire slowly eased out from its revolving drum, lowering the plate on its supporting wires inch by inch down the side of the ship.

One by one the men of the cutting party came up the Jacob's ladder dangling against *Brandenburg*'s hull just clear of the hole. The last waited until the plate hung roughly in position over the hole then shouted and waved. The plate stopped in its descent and swung gently on the supporting wires. The last man started up the ladder.

Smith had seen all of this and now took his knife, cut short the fuse level with the top of the tin. He scraped a match into flame, lit the stub of fuse that remained and told Jake, "Take us down to the staging."

Jake had been frantically whispering, though he could have shouted and not been heard for the clattering of the winch, "What are you doing? That stuff burns away so damn

quick For God's sake – " But now he ceased and dug in the paddle, sent the canoe skimming along the side of the cruiser.

Kurt Larsen saw the spurt of flame, a faint pinprick of orange in the outer darkness that glowed for a second or two and then was extinguished His first thought was that someone had thrown a cigarette end over the side Smoking on the upper deck was forbidden and he'd have the bastard's guts for a necktie But then he leaned over the rail to see better and there was the canoe below, just entering the ring of light cast by the arc lamps. It carried two men and the one in the bow held a big tin on his knees.

Kurt shouted, "Sentry! Alarm! Boat alongside! Who has a carbine!" He peered around him as the last of the cutters paused with one leg over the rail, staring at him. No one was armed There was a sentry in the bow but he could not hear Larsen above the noise of the winch One of the waiting gang ran towards the sentry, mouth opening and closing, shouting.

The canoe slid alongside the staging and the man in the bow stepped out, lifted the tin from the canoe, set it down on the staging and shoved it between the dangling plate and the ship's side Kurt could see the pale speck of light glowing inside the top of the tin. The man stepped back into the canoe and sat down as the other in the stern worked furiously with his paddle to drive the fragile craft away from the staging. The man in the bow looked up then and his face was daubed with paint or dirt but Kurt knew him

The sentry pounded up to Kurt, who now shouted at the man on the winch, "Haul it up! *Up!*" And to the rest: "Get back! Get *down*!"

The sentry's rifle cracked in Larsen's ear, but the man was excited, panting from his short sprint and the canoe had slid out of the light, was a barely seen shadow merging into the night. Then it was gone. Kurt shoved the sentry back from the rail, took a step with him, then was lifted and thrown across the deck.

Smith had recognised the young officer in that last glance

before leaving the staging. Then he had turned his head to look back as the canoe spurted out of the light and into the darkness. He saw the flash that lit the sky and the silver backcloth of the falls, then the blast wave thrust at him and tilted the canoe, the roar of the explosion deafened him.

The arc lights hanging over *Brandenburg*'s side blinked out and the ship was hidden for all her length in the sudden darkness. Water had rolled in over the side of the canoe as it heeled and now washed inches deep in the bottom but the furiously working paddles of Smith and Jake still drove the flimsy craft down the river. When Smith made out the twin marker buoys right ahead he turned again for another look at the ship. She was lit again now by a score of lights, some of them moving, torches held in hands. There was smoke hanging over her fore part. Smith could not see what damage had been done, except that – was the plate still dangling? He could not be sure.

Jake's mouth was open wide and through ringing ears Smith heard the high-pitched "*Yahoo!*" as Jake whooped in triumph. Smith decided he would let his celebration wait until the light of the morrow showed if there was any cause for it.

The canoe slid between the marker buoys, moving swiftly with the current. They saw the launch together, Jake's yell of: "Boat ahead!" blending with Smith's order, "Left!" The canoe's prow swung away from the launch hurrying upriver to investigate the explosion, her stern tucked down on a cushion of foam, racing at full power. For a few seconds Smith thought they might have escaped detection. As the canoe now headed for the river bank he turned his head and saw the launch holding to her course upstream. But then she began to turn.

Smith faced forward and plied his paddle inexpertly but with desperate energy. Fortunately Jake was expert. He corrected the wavering in their course caused by Smith's furious digging and held the canoe straight and steady. They could both see the darker line of the wizened trees drawn thickly above the glinting oiliness of the river's surface. That represented safety and it could not come too soon. It might not come soon enough.

They heard the *crack*! of the first rifle shot from behind them. The next they heard whip overhead before the sound of the report reached them. Then there were two rifles firing, the shots coming too quickly for one man to be working the bolt. They heard these buzzing close by their heads like angry bees and one smashed through the ply and canvas hull of the canoe high in the bow. Smith saw the splinters fly, the hole appear in front of him, and realised the bullet must have passed under his raised elbow.

Then they ran into the trees, the drooping, weed strung branches giving like springs so cushioning the shock, but the sudden halt threw both of them forward. Smith shouted, "Jump!" They dared not delay for seconds in the open while they worked the canoe deeper into the cover of the water courses winding between the trees. The launch would be upon them in seconds. As Smith rolled over the side to stand waist-deep in water he looked back and saw the launch's bow standing high as it charged in. He also saw that Jake was out of the canoe on the other side and already wading into the shelter of the trailing branches, arms flailing to give him impetus, the Lee-Enfield clutched in one hand.

Smith followed his example, headed towards the tall, young American and bawled at him, "Keep down!" He bent himself so he was thrusting through the mud-stinking water with his body level to it, his face only inches above the surface. And now the bullets sent showers of small splinters around him as they sliced through the tops of the trees.

He heard the long-drawn-out crackling and crash as the launch drove into the trees and was dragged to a halt. Then there was shouting, distant splashing and he knew men were leaping into the river to hunt him down. The beams of torches held in the hands of the hunters bounced about over the curling, muddy waters, were slatted by the branches of the trees. He saw Jake only feet away, standing upright with the rifle at his shoulder aimed at the launch.

Smith panted, "No!" He reached out and grabbed Jake's arm, turned him around as the rifle came down and dragged him deeper into the jungle of crooked branches and clutching weeds. "Fire that and it gives away our position!"

"So why did we bring the damn thing?"

"If they catch up with us then we'll have to shoot. Not before." And Smith hauled him on, cursing.

When the beams of the torches swung towards them they ducked down beneath the branches and froze until the cones of light had jerked past and away. Then they would lift their heads again and flounder on. When the voices and the lights fell away behind them, they knew they had evaded the pursuit.

They made a big circle through the wizened trees then tall timber, heading downriver and turning to meet it again. They were not sure just where they had lost the canoe and come ashore. They found the stream at last, and the branch where lay the *Mary Ellen*. The lighter lay in total darkness and as they waded up to it a voice challenged, "Who goes there?"

Smith recognised it and answered. "Captain here. Don't shoot me, Buckley." He and Jake pulled themselves up over the lighter's side, Buckley reaching out a helping hand after rapping on the deck. That rapping brought Garrity out of the hatch from below. He listened as Buckley asked, "Are you both all right? We heard the bomb go off. What happened to the canoe, sir?"

"We're wet, but that's all," Smith answered him, "and *Brandenburg*'s guardboat has what's left of the canoe."

Garrity led them below then, leaving Buckley on watch. A blanket was now hung as a black-out curtain at the foot of the companion and when they pushed through that they found the saloon lit only by a small, blue light. But then, with the hatch shut, Garrity lit the big lamp.

The saloon was warm and snug, welcoming in that light after the terrors of the night. Jake said, "Home, sweet home. Boy!" He blew out a long sigh. The French girl had poured coffee for them and he found Veronique's eyes on him, concerned. He caught a glimpse of himself in a small mirror on the bulkhead, saw that he was coated with mud, slime and weeds and his eyes stared wildly. He was not surprised at the girl's reaction. He thought then that he was very glad to see her, and she had changed in some way. She wore a clean, crisply ironed shirt and had done something to her hair.

But Garrity was asking, "Did the bomb do any damage, put back their work?"

Jake said wrily, "Well, if it threw as big a fright into them as it did me, they won't come out of the trees for a week."

But Smith rubbed at his face and sat down wearily at the table, reaction having him in its grip now. He clenched his hands around the mug of coffee to hide the shaking that always came at this time when the action was over. He said, "Call me as soon as it's light. We won't know until morning."

Kurt Larsen had never lost consciousness. He was as aware of the lightning flash and thunder crack as he was of the blast that hurled him across the cruiser's deck to the port rail. He stood up and found that his legs were not working properly and wandered weakly under him. He persevered and crossed to the starboard side again. He checked on his petty officers and his men and found they were all uninjured, though shaken and deafened like himself. By that time he had control of his legs and inspected the damage.

He reported to his captain on the bridge soon afterwards, related how he had seen the canoe with Smith in the bow and how he had planted the explosive charge. "It was done very coolly, as if he were not in any danger and had all the time in the world."

Then they listened as Hessler, the Engineer Officer, gave his assessment of the damage: "The staging has gone, of course, a total loss. There is further damage to the ship's side, needing more work before we can fit another plate. And the plate itself – " Hessler shook his head at Kurt in exasperation mixed with admiration: "If your Englishman had simply planted the charge on the staging then that would have gone but most of the force of the blast would have been outwards and dissipated harmlessly. But he jammed it between the ship's side and the plate hanging in position over the hole. The explosion threw the plate outwards and the supporting wires snapped. Now it's lying on the bottom of the river and we'll have to send down divers to recover it. I think we've lost five hours, maybe more."

Moehle asked quietly, "Can we sail by tomorrow night?"

Hessler hesitated, then answered, "We can "

Paul Brunner came onto the bridge now and said, "The pilot has returned." The Executive Officer stood aside and motioned forward the bulky figure who followed him.

The pilot smiled nervously around him, his broad face glistening with sweat and that was not because of the heat of the night and his climb to the bridge. He said, "We were almost rammed and shot by the guardboat. Her crew were jumpy. They said you'd been attacked."

Moehle's fingers tapped irritably on the bridge screen. He said, "We were." Then he asked, "What did you learn?"

The pilot said, "There's no report of the prisoners – "

Moehle cut him off there, bursting out: "We *know* where they are!" And as the pilot gaped at him he curtly described the bomb attack, and finished: "One of the men was not identified but the other was one of the prisoners who escaped from this ship! They are hiding in the forest!"

The pilot was nodding eagerly now and he said, "Ah! Otto Bergmann, myself and some others, we discussed the situation The *Mary Ellen*, she is a lighter, owned by an Englishman with an American for a crew. She was out in the river most of the night when the prisoners escaped. She sailed for the northern shore at noon today with a cargo for the quarry there, but she did not deliver it. The foreman at the quarry wirelessed this evening to ask where she was "

Moehle said dubiously, "You think she picked up the prisoners?"

The pilot said significantly, "She carries a canoe lashed to her foredeck."

Moehle frowned, but then admitted, "It is possible, I suppose They are here, that is a fact, and they were using a canoe. So?"

The pilot spread his hands, "Otto Bergmann has a big launch I understand he also has a grudge against the owner of the lighter and his American crewman. Bergmann and some of his comrades are going to search for the *Mary Ellen* tomorrow, starting at the mouth of the river. And Fritz Nagel, who flies the mail plane up the coast every day, he will carry out an aerial search in the morning. Wherever that lighter is, they'll find her."

15

Turkey Shoot

Smith, Jake and Garrity were eating breakfast, all of them still tired after only a few hours' sleep, when Veronique stepped out of the galley into the saloon and asked, "What is that noise?" They listened and then heard through the open scuttle the distant buzzing of an aircraft engine

Jake said, "That'll be the guy on the mail run. Feller called Fritz Nagel He flies out and up the coast every day about this time " Then he frowned, "But out of his way, this morning – "

Smith jumped for the ladder to the deck, calling over his shoulder, "Keep under cover!"

He also obeyed that instruction once out of the hatch. He ran forward into the bow but never showed himself outside the awning Garrity had spread over the upperworks of the *Mary Ellen* at Smith's order. With Buckley helping and urging he had also cut branches from the low trees crowding the bank of the side channel in which the lighter lay and spread them over and around her fat hull.

Smith stopped in the bow and looked for Buckley, who was on watch a hundred yards away where the side channel joined the stream that ran down into the river. He saw the big man splashing through the shallows towards the lighter and at the same moment Buckley saw him in the deep shade under the awning and bawled a warning, "Aircraft!"

Smith shouted to him, "Get down!" Buckley heard him, waved a hand then swerved aside and plunged into the trees. He was lost to sight as he crouched and the branches closed over him. Buckley still remembered old habits learned twenty years before.

Smith looked for the plane, the buzzing of its engine now become a drone, and saw it turning less than a mile away on

the far side of the river. It swung in a lazy half-circle then headed towards the stream where the lighter was hidden. Smith drew back further into the shadows and watched through a gap in the branches hanging like a fringe from the awning.

The aircraft was a single-engined, high-wing monoplane with graceful lines. Its silver fuselage glinted in the early morning sunlight as it flew low and slowly towards the river and then across it. It was clear that the aircraft was searching, flying a zig-zag pattern back and forth across the river as it worked its way upstream. Smith knew what it was seeking.

Jake knelt beside him where he crouched on the lighter's hot deck, and asked, "You think he's looking for us?"

Smith asked in return, "Is he a friend of Otto, the Nazi you told me about?"

"Not exactly. I get the feeling Fritz doesn't like Bergmann. Sort of polite, but – "

Smith put in, "But he'd rally around the flag."

"Oh, sure." Then Jake nodded, "Yeah. I got it. He's looking for us, or he wouldn't be this far upriver."

He had to shout the last words because the plane was close now, heading straight for the hidden *Mary Ellen*. Jake started to edge forward to see better but Smith held him back and shouted in his ear, "Your face will show like a light! And keep still!"

Jake sank back on his heels and together they waited as the plane was lost to sight behind the awning as it snarled overhead then reappeared on the far side. Now it was dwindling in size, the snarl lowering again to a drone as it went away. Jake asked, "Think he saw us?"

Smith let out the breath he had held and shook his head. "If he had he would have circled for a good look, to be sure and to mark the spot." It was circling now, but low over the pool where *Brandenburg* lay. A light sparked from the silver fuselage, blinking as it stuttered out in morse. Smith could not read it but did not need to; the pilot was reporting to the cruiser that he had drawn a blank. Then the light ceased its flickering and the plane straightened its course. It set off northward, steadily climbing.

Jake stood up. "He's back on the mail run." He turned to

Smith and asked, "So what do we do now?"

But then Buckley waded out of the trees and halted alongside the *Mary Ellen*. "He never saw a thing. You made a good job of the camouflage." He spoke to Garrity, now out on the deck with Véronique.

Smith agreed, "That's right." Then to Jake, "I want you to take over the watch from Buckley. He can eat and I have a job for him." Jake splashed away and Smith told Buckley and Garrity what he wanted done to the *Mary Ellen* – and what he planned for her.

The corners of Garrity's mouth dropped and his shoulders slumped, like a hurt child. He asked miserably, "I suppose you've got to? I mean, you haven't seen *Brandenburg* since you planted that bomb. Maybe you've already smashed her up good and proper."

Smith answered gravely, "That's true. It may not be necessary. I hope it isn't." He answered with good reason because what he planned would put his life at risk – again. The bomb might have done enough damage to delay *Brandenburg*'s repairs and her sailing so she could not go to the aid of *Graf Spee*. But Smith had to be prepared in case it had not. So he finished, "But I want the *Mary Ellen* ready."

He borrowed the binoculars and set out for the pool. A disgruntled Jake watched him go from his place on watch at the junction of the side channel with the main stream. Buckley had built a hide there out of branches clothed with the glossy, dark green leaves, from which a man could watch the main stream in some comfort, protected from the heat of the sun. But Jake did not want comfort. He craved action.

Smith headed for the pool, moving quickly but warily. It was likely that *Brandenburg*'s captain had mounted sentries on shore to give warning of another attack from that direction, might even have sent out patrols. Smith again found a place in the shelter of the tall timber and looking down on the carpet of bushes and stunted trees sweeping away to the pool. He settled down to study the ship through the binoculars, but first he swept the shore-line, then worked inland.

It was some minutes before he focused on one seaman, dressed in tropical whites, a rifle slung over his shoulder. The man had taken cover behind a dwarf tree but moved

frequently and he showed then Smith continued his search and located the other sentries one by one in a rough line threaded through the stunted trees and along the edge of the river bank. They stood on the land and kept their feet dry but the trees beyond them were rooted in water, he could see the glint of the sun on it. Smith judged the men to be three or four hundred yards away, about halfway between him and the cruiser.

Now his scrutiny shifted to the ship New staging had been assembled and hung over the side Men were on the staging and the plate was being lowered from sheerlegs to cover the hole in the hull Smith scowled with disappointment; he had hoped to have done more damage. There was a boat close alongside the staging and something familiar about the gear aboard her . . Then he had it: a diver was working from the boat, was under the surface now. Why? To examine the cruiser's bottom for further damage? No, that would have been done earlier. And the explosion of last night would not have injured *Brandenburg* below the waterline So . . .

He nodded with satisfaction this time. That was *a* plate hanging from the sheerlegs and not *the* plate that had dangled there last night It lay at the bottom of the pool and the diver was engaged on its recovery. They would need two plates for the repairs And how much time? He tried to calculate it in his head, knowing that the captain of the cruiser wanted desperately to sail this night. So he would drive his men if he had to, but they seemed to be willing anyway and had worked like furies to have done so much.

He thought that, despite last night's explosion, *Brandenburg* would be ready to sail this night. And that meant . . . Well, all right Garrity and Buckley were preparing the *Mary Ellen* now. She would be ready before nightfall.

Would he? The strains and physical effort of the last few days, escaping from the cruiser and the subsequent lack of sleep, were taking their toll. He felt weary, could have closed his eyes against the glare of the sun and slept. He had to force himself to worm back deeper into the tall trees, then stand up and start back to the lighter. But there was work to be done, *Brandenburg* to be delayed and held in this pool as long as possible.

Just the same, they all needed sleep and if the work was done in time they could all snatch a couple of hours before darkness fell.

He came out on the side channel almost opposite where Jake sat in the hide and kept watch through the screen of leaves for anyone approaching up the main stream. Jake said, "Jesus! This is driving me crazy! Sitting here counting flies. How about a relief and a job?"

Smith said, "I'll see to it." He pointed at a string that coiled out of the bushes on the bank of the channel, its end tied to a stake in the hide. "What's that?"

Jake explained, "Alarm signal. If anyone shows out there in the stream I pull the string and some cans rattle aboard the *Mary Ellen*. It's crude but it works."

Smith said, "Good idea."

Jake nodded. "Thanks. One of mine." Then he asked, "What did you see of the ship?" Smith told him and when he had finished Jake scowled at him. "So they'll still be ready on time."

Smith said, "Yes, but we aren't finished." He pointed at the rifle resting in the crook of Jake's arm. "You don't need that, shouldn't use it here. This is an observation post. It'll be better if you just sound the alarm and get back to the lighter as quick as you can."

Jake looked down at the rifle then said, "I'll unload it and clean it. Tell you what, ask Veronique to bring me a cup of coffee; I'm parched. I'll send the gun back with her."

"I'll ask her." Smith walked back through the shallows of the side channel to the *Mary Ellen* lying under her camouflage of green awning and heaped branches. The string from the hide looped up out of the trees and over the side to a clutch of empty cans hanging from a stanchion.

He found Garrity and Buckley toiling at the tasks he had set them and they had made progress. Both of them were stripped to the waist and ran with sweat but a good part of the lighter's buoyant cargo, such as timber, had been unloaded and dumped in among the trees. They paused in the work and straightened while he reported to them as he had to Jake.

They heard him out in silence, then Garrity drew a long

breath and said, "So you're going ahead."

Smith answered, "Yes." And: "I know what she means to you." Garrity was facing ruin. The *Mary Ellen* was all he had. So Smith promised, "I'll get full compensation for you." But Garrity was not solely concerned with money.

The little man stroked the black steel side of the lighter, hot to the touch, in a caress. He said, "She was built for service, so it's only fitting she ends up that way."

Buckley said quickly, changing the subject, "Did you see our inventor?" He nodded at the cans.

Smith grinned, "He wants a relief. Any volunteer?"

Garrity said, "Not here, but there's one below. She's offered to stand a watch. We wouldn't let her manhandle this stuff." He kicked at one of the baulks of timber standing half out of the hold.

Smith thought that the girl could pull the alarm string as well as anyone and Jake had wanted coffee. He dropped down the hatch and asked the girl. A few minutes later she was on her way down the side channel to the hide, a steaming mug in one hand, the other pushing at her hair.

Smith grinned, stripped off his shirt, laid his pistol on top of it and started work with the other two

Veronique found Jake in the hide and cleaning the rifle but when he saw her he packed the little oil bottle and scrap of cotton in the socket in the butt of the weapon and took the mug from her. She said, "Smith wants me to relieve you here so you can help with the work."

Jake gulped down the coffee, handed her the mug and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "Thanks. It's time we did something about that damn ship."

"What do you mean?"

But Jake only eased out of the hide to make room for her to take his place. He said, "I'll be seeing you." He started back up the side channel, waded across it, rounded a bend and was gone from her sight.

A half-hour passed before Smith wiped sweat from his brow and asked, "Did Jake come back?"

Buckley shook his head and Garrity said, "Haven't seen him."

Smith stared down the side channel. The hide was barely

two hundred yards away around two snaking bends. There was one obvious reason why a young man should dally with a girl, but there had been no sign of that kind of relationship building. And Smith was uneasy. He shrugged into his shirt that stuck to his wet body, picked up the pistol and headed downstream to the hide.

He asked Veronique, "Where's Jake?" But already he could guess at the answer.

"He went back to the lighter."

"No, he didn't. Did he say that was where he was going?"

The girl shook her head, eyes wide. "He said only 'I'll be seeing you' " Then remembering, "Oh! And 'It was time we did something about the ship.'"

Smith turned and threw over his shoulder, "Tell them I've gone to the pool to look for him! You all wait here!" Then he left her at a run.

That slowed to a trot and then a walk but he pressed on as fast as he could in the heat and against the slope. He had no breath to spare but he cursed Jake in his mind. Then he heard the shots. They were a guide and he headed towards the sound of them.

Jake had sprawled in the outskirts of the tall timber where he had the cover of undergrowth but a good view of the bow of the *Brandenburg*. He saw the staging, the plate now in position, the boat and the diver working from it, all as Smith had described. He estimated the range at 600 yards, set the sights of the rifle accordingly and tucked the butt into his shoulder.

He was a good shot and had used the rifle before. The first round he fired drilled into the staging between the feet of two of the men working there, kicking up splinters. They did not hear the report of the rifle because of the shipboard noise around them, only the whip crack of the bullet's passage through the air, the hammer thud as it buried itself in the timber. They hesitated, looking at each other, not used to being under fire, not totally sure that they were. Then Jake's second shot ricochetted, howling off the cruiser's steel side. Doubt and hesitation fled and they jumped for the ladder running up to the deck, yelling their warning, and the others

on the staging followed them.

Jake watched them go, not sure whether he was sorry he had missed, but content that he had stopped their work. He saw the other men on *Brandenburg*'s foredeck had taken cover, but it was obvious by the way some of them crouched still in his view that they did not know where he was. That was confirmed when the machine-guns opened up aboard the cruiser because none of them laid down fire anywhere near him. He waited, grinning now, because Smith had been over-cautious in his estimate of the enemy reaction: 'They'll blast you out of the forest.' Jake was safe and had single-handedly stopped the work on *Brandenburg*'s hull.

After several hundred rounds and ten minutes or so the machine-guns fell silent, men rose from cover on the foredeck and some of them climbed down the ladder to the staging again. They, or their officers, had decided the sniper was dead or had run away from that savage fire. Jake waited until the staging was crowded with them and opened fire again.

This time he laughed aloud after the third shot and lowered the rifle. "Turkey shoot!" He had just aimed for the crowd on the staging and it had boiled as the shots wrought panic among the men there. He stopped laughing as he saw one man hauled up the ship's side, hanging limp on the end of a line.

But this time some of the machine-gun fire was closer and a few of the sentries posted in a line through the dwarf timber tried shots at where they thought they had seen the flicker of muzzle flame. One of them snapped twigs from a branch only feet away from Jake's head, but none of the sentries thought to leave his post and look for the sniper. The firing died away. Another ten minutes passed before a man walked along *Brandenburg*'s foredeck and climbed down the ladder to the staging.

Kurt Larsen sweated but was cold despite the blazing heat of the sun. Moehle had said grimly, "It's the Englishman or one of his crew. We'll settle with him this time but he's trying to hold up the work so he won't fire and give away his position until he sees someone on the staging. I need a

volunteer."

So now Kurt stepped off the ladder onto the staging and walked along it. He hoped that by moving he might evade a bullet. When it came it glanced off the dangling plate and howled end over end past his ear. Kurt kept on walking. Moehle had a score of look-outs with binoculars searching for the sniper's hiding place.

The second bullet snapped close over his head with a *crack!* as it ripped through the air. He half-crouched then straightened again, turned as he reached the end of the staging, began to retrace his steps with his back to the unseen rifleman. Every shot fired gave the look-outs a better chance of success. And once they located the sniper . . .

The third shot passed through his shirt and burned along his side. Later he found a raw, red weal marking its passage. Now he winced and staggered but then realised the look-outs had found the sniper as *Brandenburg*'s anti-aircraft batteries opened up. There were a half-dozen guns that would bear on his position and each of them poured in 20mm high-explosive shells at a rate of more than 400 a minute.

Smith had looked for Jake and found him when he fired the first of the three shots at Kurt Larsen. Smith saw the brief spit of orange flame and the wisp of smoke in the undergrowth at the edge of the tall timber. He worked through the trees towards it as Jake fired the second shot and saw the wink of flame further down the slope where the sentries were posted and firing. He was twenty yards from the young man, could see him sprawled in the shadows with the rifle at his shoulder, when the third shot was fired and then *Brandenburg*'s barrage hit the forest.

Jake was shocked, disoriented, as the shells burst above him in the trees in a box a hundred yards square. This was beyond his experience and his imagination. He was unable to think or act except to let the rifle fall and put his hands over his tortured ears. He lay where he was, pressed to the earth.

Smith ran in and found him thus, grabbed his shoulder with one hand, the rifle with the other. He hauled Jake to his

knees, turned him around then kicked and shoved him towards the safety of the forest. Jake climbed to his feet and moved obediently, dazedly, then more quickly as fear overrode his shock and gave impetus to his flight. Smith herded him deeper into the forest as the 20mm guns shifted their aim in a creeping barrage. The shells now ripped into shreds the bushes where Jake had hidden.

After a few seconds the barrage ceased and Smith asked, "Are you all right?"

Jake rubbed at his face that was without feeling under his hands. He said huskily, "Yeah, I guess so." He licked his lips and could not control their twitching. "That was some turkey shoot."

Smith ceased shepherding him then and pressed on ahead, left Jake to trail behind. They trudged through the forest in silence and were almost back at the lighter before Jake spoke again, "You knew that would happen."

Smith answered shortly, "Yes."

Jake said, "I was trying – "

Smith did not let him finish: "I know what you were trying to do. So did Moehle. So he stopped you."

"They murdered my mother and – "

Again Smith cut him off: "They didn't. Some U-boat captain did." Now he turned, but without breaking his stride, to stare bleakly at the young man. "Don't start out on a campaign of revenge. That could destroy you. It nearly did today."

Jake muttered, "You said we had to stop that ship from sailing on time."

Smith answered definitely, "We will."

Jake was silenced by that conviction. Smith wished he was as certain as he pretended.

They were within yards of the *Mary Ellen* when the hanging cans aboard her jerked on the string from the hide and jangled their alarm. Smith waved at Buckley and Garrity peering down from the deck then led Jake at a floundering run down the side channel. As they approached the hide they slowed, went up to it cautiously and quietly. At first they saw only the bushes strung from the rope and hanging like a screen between them and the main stream, but then

they eased into the shelter beside Veronique and she pointed at a slit between two of the branches forming the hide.

The guardboat, *Brandenburg*'s launch, was cruising slowly up the middle of the main stream. There were sailors on her deck in tropical whites and armed with rifles. There was also, now, a machine-gun mounted on a short tripod in the bow and one man sat behind it. All the men stared out at the banks of the stream, eyes searching as the launch, throttled back, plugged slowly against the current

They passed within forty yards of Smith and the other two but did not penetrate the screen though they seemed to glare right into the hide Jake felt Veronique shudder, pressed against his side. He slid his arm around her waist and she stiffened then relaxed, leant against him. The launch swung around a bend in the stream and slid out of sight.

In the hide they moved, straightened, stretched. Véronique slid out of Jake's arm, smiled shakily at him and said, "I am glad you came. I was – frightened "

Jake thought that he and Smith would not have been much help to her if the launch had turned that machine-gun on them. But he only said to Smith, "See that gun they've got aboard her now? Those guys mean business next time."

Smith nodded but said nothing, stayed looking out through the slit in the screen. Véronique bit her lip and said softly, "They will return."

"Soon," Smith answered her, "the stream narrows quickly once around that bend and I think it probably shallows as well."

They only had to wait a few minutes and then the launch hove into sight again, sliding down on them and then past more quickly this time with the current shoving at her The men aboard her were more relaxed, too, talking among themselves. They still scrutinised the bank but idly, they had searched this stretch already and found it empty. The launch puttered away downstream and was gone.

Now they relaxed in the hide, the tension running out of them. The girl took off her spectacles and wiped them on a handkerchief. Jake grinned at her and she smiled back at him. He thought with sudden surprise that she was really a

pretty girl. He had never looked at her properly before. Then he saw her face flush and realised he was staring.

Smith said, "There's a lot to do aboard the *Mary Ellen*." He led Jake back to the lighter, leaving the girl on watch. Smith only spoke once more, passing the rifle back to Jake and asking, "How good are you with that?"

"Pretty fair. I got one for sure today." Then Jake remembered the limp body being hauled up *Brandenburg*'s side on the end of a line. He recalled Smith's words, that the men on the cruiser were innocent of the killing of his mother and that a campaign of revenge could destroy him. He didn't feel too good about his shooting now.

In Montevideo, Sarah and Hannah went again to the Shipping Advisory Department on the top floor of the Bolsa de Comercial building. Sarah asked, "Have you any word of the *Whitby*?" Her father's ship had not docked on the fifteenth nor on the morning of this, the sixteenth.

She was told, "No signal was received from her after the evening of the twelfth. She isn't answering."

Sarah glanced worriedly at Hannah then turned back to the man behind the desk. "My father is aboard her."

"I see." He hesitated, then said, "There's no reason to worry unduly, as yet She may have had to stop her engines to carry out some work on them and at the same time had trouble with her wireless That's an unlikely coincidence, I admit, but not impossible." There was also another possibility, that *Whitby* had met a raider or a U-boat. He kept that to himself; there was still hope.

Outside Hannah put an arm around the girl and encouraged her, "C'mon, kid! Like he said, there could be all kinds of good reasons for that ship being late." Behind her smile, Hannah wished miserably that someone would comfort her.

Sarah smiled brightly in her turn. "Of course. Let's get back to work." But she had an awful fear that her father might be dead, like her mother and stepfather in Berlin. She had waited then for news.

They returned to the hotel and Hannah's pacing and dictating, Sarah's typing, both abstracted, thoughts elsewhere. It was evening when Sarah answered the knock at the door

of her room. The man standing in the corridor of the hotel wore a rumpled lightweight suit and carried a Panama hat in one hand. He asked, "Miss Smith?" Then looking beyond her and seeing Hannah: "Miss Fitzsimmons?"

Hannah said, "You're right on both counts, but what about you?"

He smiled, "I'm from the Embassy. May I come in?"

But Hannah asked, straightfaced, "Which Embassy would that be?"

He blinked, then grinned at her, "Sorry. Should have said. The British Embassy."

She grinned back at him, "Of course." Then to Sarah, "Do you want me to go find myself a drink and leave you to talk alone?"

The man lifted the hand holding the hat, "No. I'd prefer you to stay, please." Then as Sarah closed the door behind him he said, "Because I would like your help as well, Miss Fitzsimmons."

He left ten minutes later and as the door closed behind him Hannah said, "Well, I guess we'd better rehearse this some. It's going to have to look real. I'll sit over here and you come in." She sat down at the small table by the window.

Sarah drew back to stand by the door and asked, "Ready?"

Hannah sipped at an imaginary Martini then called, "Action!"

Sarah hurried forward.

An hour passed before Hannah glanced at her watch and said, "OK. I think we've got it. You give me a half hour. Right?"

Sarah nodded and Hannah left the room and the hotel, took a taxi to a restaurant near the waterfront. A waiter showed her to a table and she ordered a Martini. "I'll eat later." Then she took her notebook from her bag and began to write. The tables around her were occupied mainly by men. They had halted their conversations to watch the entrance of this lithe, well dressed woman, but after a minute their talk started again. They spoke in German.

Hannah took no notice but sipped at the Martini, scowled

at the notebook then at her watch, scored a thick line through a sentence and wrote it again. She did not look up when Sarah hurried in through the swing doors, paused on the threshold with eyes searching, then sighted Hannah and made for her table.

The talk stopped again. This girl had that effect with her high colour of excitement, the sleek and shining blonde cap and the thinly dressed figure. Now Hannah raised her head from the notebook and greeted her, "Hi! Whaddaya know?"

Sarah slipped into a chair opposite Hannah. "The *Dunster Grange* has sailed."

Hannah stared at her, "What?"

"The British have sent her to sea to delay the *Graf Spee* from sailing. The twenty-four hour rule under the Hague Convention, remember? *Graf Spee* can't sail until twenty-four hours after a British ship has left the port."

"Oh, sure. I know about that. So what?"

"I know why they want to hold her here for another day; I found out at the Embassy. Harwood is expecting two capital ships to join him by tomorrow morning. *Ark Royal*, that's an aircraft carrier, and *Renown*. Isn't she a battleship?"

Hannah corrected her: "Battlecruiser, and that means faster than *Graf Spee*. But you've done a great job, honey!" Hannah knocked back the rest of the Martini and called for her check. "Waiter!" She got up and tossed money onto the table, grabbed her notebook with one hand, Sarah's arm with the other. "C'mon! I've got to get back and file this story!"

She and Sarah weaved their way out between the tables, hips swinging. The men they passed stared at each other and began to mutter in explosive German. Outside the restaurant Hannah said, "Well, I guess they swallowed it." She raised a hand to flag a passing taxi and it swerved into the kerb.

Sarah agreed, "I believe they did. Why do you think he wanted us to do it?"

Hannah ducked into the cab. "That story will get back to *Graf Spee*'s captain and his crew. It will be another worry for them, wondering just what *is* waiting for them out there. It's designed to keep *Graf Spee* in here as long as possible."

Sarah followed her. "So I suppose it isn't true about those two big ships being outside."

It was not. Robert Hurst stood on the deck of *Ajax* and stared at the horizon beyond which lay Montevideo and the pocket battleship. He had heard the signal made by Harwood, his orders to his ships, to be carried out on their sighting the enemy when he came out of Montevideo: " . . . My intention is destruction . . . "

Bill Donovan, his thick shoulders bulking beside the slight figure of Hurst, said drily, "But whose destruction was he talking about?" Hurst grinned Donovan was not the only one in *Ajax* to say it. He and Hurst were not the only ones aboard to find wry humour in their plight

Harwood's three cruisers had still not received any reinforcement and would not for some days. His men knew that. When *Graf Spee* had steamed into the port she had shown no sign of serious damage nor loss of speed, was still firing her fearsome main armament of 11-inch guns as effectively as ever. They knew that, too.

"Whose destruction?" Joke.

Robert Hurst wondered how his father would have behaved in the battle still to come, was certain it would have been with courage and distinction He realised he was proud of this man he had never seen, while still distrusting him for abandoning Robert's mother.

Where was Captain David Cochrane Smith now?

16

HMS *Mary Ellen*

Smith used the little dynamite that remained to make a small charge and set this against the hull in the saloon of the *Mary Ellen* so it was a foot below the waterline. He carried two of the sandbags down from the deck and used them to cover the charge so as to concentrate the blast against the hull. The fuse he led up to the wheelhouse through a hole he drilled in the deck. There were twelve feet of fuse. He told Jake, who was labouring at building the sandbags around the wheelhouse, "That should give us about six and a half minutes."

Jake panted, resting on the wall of sandbags. "Let me know when to start counting." But he hated the thought of the charge so close to him.

Smith knew it, knew the fear himself. He said, "I'm going to look at *Brandenburg* again. I'll be back before dark." There were two hours of daylight left. The shadows were lengthening but the sun had not lost its heat. Buckley and Garrity were sweating rivers where they filled the sandbags. More accurately, they were mudbags, Garrity holding the neck of a sack open while Buckley shovelled in the semi-liquid earth at the edge of the side channel.

They looked up at Smith and Buckley said worriedly, "Watch out they don't see you, sir." Jake had told him how he had been shelled by *Brandenburg* and dragged to safety by Smith. The tall young man had confessed to Buckley, "He was right and I was wrong. And he risked his neck to haul me out."

Smith had not forgotten the barrage either, and told Buckley now, "I'll take good care they don't spot me."

"Can't one of us go with you, sir?"

Smith shook his head. "This job will need to be done by the time I get back and it will take all three of you."

Véronique was again on watch after a spell standing knee-deep in the mud and filling the bags.

The route was familiar now and Smith moved quickly, though still warily scanning the terrain ahead. He found another observation post at the edge of the tall timber where he was looking down on the pool and the cruiser. He could see her bow where the damage had been done and now he lifted the binoculars he had brought from the lighter.

His lips tightened. The men swarming along *Brandenburg*'s side now were recovering the staging. The ship still listed so that the new plates both showed above the waterline but it would not take Moehle long to correct her trim. Despite the blast of the previous night and the half-hour delay gained by Jake almost at the cost of his life, the work was done. Moehle and his crew had achieved a near miracle. *Brandenburg* would sail soon after dark and be at sea by the early hours of the morning. She would be in time to join forces with *Graf Spee* on the evening of the following day. And then God help the British squadron off the Plate.

And Robert Hurst.

Smith pushed back into the shelter of the trees, got to his feet and made his way back to the lighter. He came to the *Mary Ellen* in the dusk and found Buckley and Jake lifting a sandbag between them to set it on the roof of the wheelhouse. Garrity, watching them, turned as Smith climbed aboard and told him, "That's the last. She's as ready as she'll ever be."

Smith looked the lighter over and nodded agreement. All that part of her cargo that might have added to her buoyancy if she took in water, timber and the like, had been cast over the side. Buckley said, "Open her bottom with that charge you set, sir, and she'll go down like a brick." It was vital that when she sank, she sank quickly. Garrity winced.

The wheelhouse was roofed and walled in with sandbags, only narrow slits left on each side, rear and front, that last for the man at the wheel to see ahead. Garrity said, "Just one more thing, sir." He had a rolled cloth tucked under one arm but now he shook it and it opened out into a White Ensign. Garrity said, "I had the little Jack already but the rest I sewed up meself." That was obvious, though it was

neatly done, the red cross stitched onto a white sheet with the Union Jack in the corner.' "I want her to be dressed proper."

Smith said, "So do I. Hoist it, please."

Garrity passed the Ensign up to Jake, squatting on top of the wheelhouse. He took it and turned to the stumpy mast just aft and within arm's reach of him, then paused. There were no halyards on the mast. Smith said, "Pass him a hammer and nails."

So Jake nailed the Ensign to the mast.

Smith said, "We go now." He dared wait no longer or *Brandenburg* might escape him.

He did not need to elaborate. Early that day he had told them his plan and they had mulled it over, talked it over, ever since. So now Buckley and Jake stripped away the camouflage of awning and branches, tossed it all into the shallows and splashed in after it. Garrity launched the little dinghy over the stern and then joined them. Smith moved towards the engine – and the tins jangled madly at the end of the string from the hide.

They all stood for a moment, frozen, wondering if the slight rocking of the lighter as they tramped about her deck had caused the tins to shake. But then they kept on rattling and clinking to the jerking of the string – the men could see it tightening like a fiddle-string, relaxing, then snapping taut again.

Jake grabbed the rifle and plunged away from the lighter's side, heading downstream towards the hide and Veronique. Smith shouted after him, "Fetch her back!" And to the other two, "Shove her off!" He started the engine as Buckley and Garrity thrust against the black hull and slowly but steadily the *Mary Ellen* eased away from her muddy bed and out into the stream where she had deeper water under her bottom.

Smith was in the wheelhouse now, peering forward over the hold and the bow. He saw Jake returning with the girl, the pair of them hand in hand, appearing where the stream bent away to the left. Spray lifted around them as they ran high-stepping through the low water at the side of the channel, two shadows dancing together in a world full of shadows now. Then they were splashing back towards him and the

lighter.

He waited for them then saw the top of the head of the tall young American show over the lighter's side. Jake swung himself aboard and Smith heard Buckley's bellow of, "Ready, sir!" So Smith knew that the big man, Garrity and Véronique were in the dinghy.

Jake edged into the wheelhouse through the narrow doorway left in the sandbags at the rear, the rifle swinging from one hand. He panted from the run and told Smith, "A launch. Otto Bergmann and some of his friends, searching by the look of it, and they're pushing through into this channel."

Smith shoved the throttle lever open and asked, "How did they find it? Was that girl in the hide?" He wondered if she had strolled out into the open, bored with the hours pent up and watching an empty stream.

Jake said, "I asked her and she said she never moved out of it. Seems Bergmann stopped right opposite the mouth of this channel and real close, squinted at it then started to shove in." Then he added, "Tell you this, though, coming back I could see the last of the light sparking off the water. Maybe they spotted that through the branches we rigged up when it wouldn't show any other time. The guys in that boat from *Brandenburg* yesterday, they were out in the middle."

Smith thought he could be right, but it did not matter. The bend was just ahead and the lighter working up a little speed now, water foaming under the bow. The dinghy she towed would be bobbing along at the end of its painter. If Bergmann had entered this side channel they would meet him –

He was there! As Smith spun the wheel to take the *Mary Ellen* around the curve in the channel he opened up the next reach. The launch was barely fifty yards ahead, cruising slowly up the side channel, hardly any white water at her stem. A man knelt in her bow and peered down into the stream, presumably watching in case the bottom shelved suddenly. There were men in the well aft of the cabin lifting in the waist but dusk was fast turning into night and they were no more than blurred silhouettes.

There was room for the lighter to pass the launch and

Smith only had to hold his course. Instead he put the wheel over and the *Mary Ellen*'s blunt bow swung around to point at the launch. The men aboard it had seen the lighter and the one in the bow was on his feet now, scurrying back to join the others in the well. Another was standing on a thwart and waving, clearly signalling to the lighter to stop. He held a rifle in the other, uplifted hand, a threat or a warning.

Smith ignored both and the *Mary Ellen* bore down on the launch. Jake asked, "Should I let him have it?" He was ready with his rifle but reluctant, talking now not of a faceless killer but of a man he knew, had passed in the street.

Smith answered, "No. Save the ammunition." The man had jumped down from the thwart and Bergmann, or whoever was at the wheel, had realised the lighter's intention and put his helm hard over. The launch began to turn away but the manoeuvre had been left too late. The *Mary Ellen* was still working up speed and the gap between her and the launch closed rapidly. Smith and Jake were suddenly looking down on the launch and now they were so close they could make out Bergmann's bulky figure at the wheel.

Then Smith spun the wheel again, bringing the bow around further still so it hid the launch from sight, and a second later they struck. The *Mary Ellen* checked, shuddered, then drove on. Smith caught a glimpse of the fore part of the launch, bow and cabin, sliding past the lighter. Men clung to the listing wreckage, mouths wide as they shouted in rage or fear. Then it was past.

Jake shouted, peering out through the doorway at the rear of the wheelhouse, "Her stern's gone, smashed away! She's sinking!"

Smith brought the lighter back onto her course downstream and said, "Never mind her." The survivors would suffer no more than a wetting. A man could walk across the stream with the water only up to his chest. "Can you see the dinghy?"

Jake confirmed, "She's there and so are they." He was talking of Veronique and the two men. "Bouncing about a bit, that's all."

Smith thought that the dinghy would, riding in the

lighter's wake. But now he could see ahead of them the screen of branches across the entrance to the main stream. Bergmann had cut his way through it and Smith aimed the bow of the lighter at the gap he had left. The *Mary Ellen* slid past the hide, through the gap and out into the main stream. When the broad expanse of the river came in sight he told Jake, "Slip the dinghy now."

Jake put down the rifle and left to do his bidding. Smith glanced back through the doorway and saw the tall young man straighten after casting off the painter. The dinghy appeared astern. A slender figure sat in the bow and a short one hunched in the sternsheets while a big man pulled at the oars. Their three faces, pale and featureless in the night, were turned towards the lighter. Jake lifted a hand and Véronique waved back to him. Smith knew that Buckley would be wishing him luck and bitterly sorry at being left behind. But this was no task for him.

The young man came back into the wheelhouse and picked up the rifle without speaking, his thoughts still on that last glimpse of the girl. Smith turned the wheel of the *Mary Ellen*, out on the river now, turned her bow into the current and headed upstream. They were out of the shelter of the stream, there was a breeze on the river and the lighter was shoving into it. Smith could hear the Ensign flapping and banging as the wind spread it out.

Jake took down from a hook two of the lifejackets Smith, Buckley and Véronique had used when escaping from *Brandenburg*. Jake put one on and took the wheel while Smith tied on the other. Smith claimed the wheel again. Now the night was upon them and it was beautiful, the river running wide and black, flecked with the silvery grey of phosphorescence. On either side the stunted brush and tall trees of the forest lifted in walls of deeper darkness. Ahead and in the middle distance was *Brandenburg*, silhouetted against the shaking silver curtain that was the falls and now their thunder came above the engine's thumping to the two in the wheelhouse.

When Jake spoke he put his mouth to Smith's ear so he did not have to shout: "There are the buoys." Smith followed the line of his pointing finger, still could not pick out

the buoys in the night but then, squinting, found them. He nodded and turned the wheel so the lighter's bow swung slowly around to the centre of the entrance of the pool. He guessed: A half-mile away?

But now Jake was shouting: "The guardboat!"

Smith snatched a glance out of the slit in the sandbags on the starboard side and saw *Brandenburg*'s launch charging out from the shore with a big white bow wave like a moustache. The guardboat itself was a blurred grey shape riding the bow wave but even as he watched the machine-gun in its bow opened fire. There was a flickering of orange flame that went on for two or three seconds and he heard the smack of the bullets when they hit the steel side of the lighter. They would be drilling into the sandbags too.

Smith's gaze was directed forward now, holding the *Mary Ellen* to her course, but from the corner of his eye he could see that Jake was braced against the sandbags with his rifle thrust out of the slit. Smith heard the crack of the report as Jake fired, the rattle as he worked the bolt, another crack. The harsh chatter of the machine-gun ceased and did not start again but Jake's firing went on rapidly. Then he was standing back, working the bolt again but this time to thumb another clip of cartridges into the breach. He closed the bolt, leaned forward into the side slit once more then swore, "The bastard's too far ahead now for me to see him from here!"

He shoved up alongside Smith, who craned forward and saw the guardboat come into view, nearly level with the lighter's bow, close now and headed in to meet her. The guardboat had twice the speed of the plodding *Mary Ellen*, would be able to range alongside so her boarding party could leap across the gap into the waist of the lighter. But Smith had reckoned on the launch attempting to board and that was why Jake was in the *Mary Ellen*'s wheelhouse now.

Jake fired rapidly then suddenly yelled in triumph, "Got him!" And Smith saw the launch veer off course, swinging away from the lighter. The man at the helm had been hit. Jake opened fire again, working the bolt quickly. The guardboat had turned her stern to him and he could see directly into the black hole of her well. There the men

aboard her would be milling about in the darkness, their gunner and helmsman hit while their own fire had no effect and now the slugs were howling around them.

The launch was turning still . . Now she was straightening out again but her course was taking her away from the lighter and the terrible rifle fire that had killed, hurt or demoralised. Her crew would lick their wounds, reorganise and come again, but not yet, not for a while. That was sufficient. Smith and the *Mary Ellen* could go about their business undisturbed That business would be difficult enough without the distraction of the guardboat

Smith took a breath and a firmer grip on the spokes of the wheel. He had told Jake that this action could be the death of both of them: "You were under fire from that ship today so you know what I mean."

Jake had said, "Suppose I say 'no'?"

"Then I'll ask one of the others."

"Why ask me first?"

"You're the best man for the job." A good shot, keen-eyed and with fast reactions, young and very fit

And Jake had done all that was asked of him but Smith thought that he was too young to die and was bitterly sorry that he had needed to bring this man barely out of his teens. Now the real danger would begin. They were nearly there.

The buoys marking the entrance to the pool were only a hundred yards ahead but now the searchlight on *Brandenburg*'s superstructure poked out a long white finger that found the *Mary Ellen* and lit her up

Kurt Larsen was red-eyed and weary as his men struck the staging from the ship's side and hauled it inboard, but like every other man aboard he was also elated and triumphant because they had done it. They had rendered *Brandenburg* fully efficient again, ready to cross the North Atlantic in winter or to fight at the side of *Graf Spee* – and she was in time to do that. The latest reports were that the pocket battleship showed no sign of leaving Montevideo before the deadline at 8 p.m. on the next day *Brandenburg*, about to get under way now, would be off the mouth of the River Plate a few hours before the deadline

He was on the cruiser's bridge after night had wrapped her around and she was making ready to sail, engines throbbing and the ship buzzing with life. His captain, Gustav Moehle, had called Larsen there as he had called others, to congratulate them personally on their achievement. It was then that the look-outs reported, "*Firing on the river, sir!*"

From the bridge Moehle and his staff could see the winks of flame from the machine gun, which they correctly concluded was that mounted on the guardboat – and from a rifle on another craft. When Moehle called for the searchlight to illuminate the scene he saw the nature of that craft. He remembered what the pilot had said about a lighter. And the pilot, standing at his side, said incredulously, "That's the *Mary Ellen*!"

Moehle did not hesitate. He could not guess the lighter's intentions but he knew she was hostile. That was emphasised when Kurt Larsen burst out, "She's flying a White Ensign!" Moehle saw it hoisted on her stump of a mast abaft her wheelhouse and laid out flat as a board as she steamed into wind. His ship was ready for sea and his comrades in Montevideo needed his help. Nothing must prevent her sailing. The lighter had to be destroyed. He ordered, "Open fire!"

The searchlight's beam washed over the low length of the *Mary Ellen* and flooded into the wheelhouse through the slits left in the stacked sandbags. Smith swallowed and said from a dry mouth, "Here it comes."

Jake knew what he meant, now. They both hunched, half-crouched, in expectation of the blow, though Smith told himself that would serve no purpose. The barrage of that morning was horribly fresh in his memory. This time he was inside the thick protection of the sandbags and not out in the open but they would not save him for long. The *Mary Ellen*, Garrity's pride and joy, his living and his life's savings, would be lost in a few minutes.

The cruiser's tall hull was hidden somewhere in the blackness beyond the glare of the searchlight. Smith could see only the river ahead lit by the beam, all else was pitch darkness now. But then a rash of muzzle flashes sprouted around the source of the beam and the *Mary Ellen* was hit.

The guns firing were the same anti-aircraft armament as used that morning but this time they were not searching for a man in hiding. They had a clear target and the range was a bare 800 metres, almost point blank. The shells were 40mm and 20mm and they tore through the thin plate of the lighter in their scores, buried themselves and burst in the thick sandbag walls around the wheelhouse. She was riddled above and below water.

Smith and Jake were deafened by the noise, stunned by the succession of shocks, almost blinded by the continual yellow glare of shell bursts. They saw everything in camera flashes between those sheets of intense light and pitchy darkness. In the wheelhouse they were like prisoners in a drum beaten and shaken by a giant hand. Their faces were contorted, teeth bared in grimaces of pain as the din beat around them, despite the cotton wool plugged in their ears. Their eyes squinted against the glare. Jake bounced about the wheelhouse as the lighter shook to the beating. Smith clung to the wheel and somehow kept the *Mary Ellen*'s head pointed at the entrance to the pool, that narrow gap between the two marker buoys.

The lighter was almost on station. Jake fetched up beside Smith and held himself there by clamping his hands on the compass binnacle. He peered through the slit looking out along the lighter's length to her bow and beyond and pointed with a stabbing finger. He was indicating the entrance; shouting was useless. Smith nodded. Jake peered again then turned on Smith, held his hand out flat then bent the fingers down. Smith nodded again, knew what he meant, had already seen that the *Mary Ellen* was down by the bows. But she was there on station now, where he wanted her.

The bow had nosed between the two marker buoys and now they slid past on either side. Smith waited, judging the lighter's speed and that of the current, until he thought she was far enough into the pool. Then he spun the wheel and she turned broadside across the stream.

At once the shelling seemed to intensify; the *Mary Ellen* was now a broader target for the gunners aboard the cruiser and every shot told. The lighter shuddered continually throughout her frame and heeled over under the battering.

In the wheelhouse they staggered and Smith jerked a thumb over his shoulder. Jake saw the gesture in the shifting glare, from searchlight and shell bursts, that lit them. He clawed his way across the yard of space to the slit in the rear of the sandbags and looked out, seeking the marker buoy on his side. He found it downriver and shoved a hand in front of Smith's face, pointing that way. Smith had found the other buoy on his side, nodded acknowledgment of Jake's signal.

The bow of the *Mary Ellen* was now under water. The engine stopped, flooded. They saw the river roll in over the side of the lighter and spill across the deck; she was sinking so quickly now. There was no need to fire the charge Smith had set against the hull, nor was there time. They shoved out of the wheelhouse, edging along the narrow passage through the stacked sandbags, Jake in the lead and Smith at his back. The river was coming in, washing first around their ankles, then their knees, now reaching up to their thighs.

They waded out onto the deck and found only the lifted stern of the lighter visible above water. As she rolled they slipped and fell, Smith on top of Jake. They floundered for a second in two feet of water, Jake in danger of drowning, then Smith hauled him onto his feet, coughing and spluttering. They fell forward again but this time into the river and struck out with the current. Then as one they turned their heads to look back. They were in time to see the stern, still lit by the searchlight's beam and ringed by the upflung spray from shell bursts. Then it slid down and out of sight below the surface of the river. Last to go was Garrity's White Ensign, still flying bravely.

The current carried them away and the guns ceased firing now that there was no target. The searchlight blinked out and the night closed around them. They rode on the current within a yard of each other, together in a small circle of visibility and all around them the outer darkness.

At the start they were shocked and numbed, lay limply and let the river take them. Then later they began to swim as well as they could in the lifejackets, keeping together and trying to edge over to the right bank of the stream. Jake found then that the arm he had fallen on was numb from the shoulder downwards. It flapped but uselessly, awkwardly.

The dark mass of the cruiser was far behind them, as was the lair of the guardboat. They saw nothing of the launch. Smith decided it may well have returned to *Brandenburg* to report and have its wounded tended, had probably been on its way back to the cruiser to be lifted inboard for the run downriver to the sea.

Then they saw the boat. First there was the pin prick of light from a torch held close above the surface of the river, the fingers of its holder wrapped across the lens so only that small point of light showed. They hailed it hoarsely and then the torch became a long, narrow cone of brilliance that sought them out then settled in a circle on their open-mouthed heads. The boat rode underneath the torch, Buckley tugging at the oars to bring it towards them, Garrity the hunched figure in the bow holding the torch, the slender figure of the girl leaning over the stern to reach out to the two exhausted men in the water.

Smith dragged himself aboard with the help of Véronique tugging at his shoulders. They turned to Jake next but he gasped, "Sorry! Right arm's gone. Broken, bruised, sprained – what the heck, I don't know, but I can't use it."

Véronique said, "We'll pull you in." She and Smith tried but failed. Jake's weight was too much for them. He could not help with just the one arm.

Buckley said, "Can you make room for me?"

Smith said, "Yes." He was about to climb out over the stern again but the girl was first, sliding into the river alongside Jake and inside his limp right arm to put her shoulder under his, lifting. As she did so he felt her breast under his right hand that he had thought as numb as the rest of that arm. He was not to forget that.

But now Buckley had taken the girl's place in the stern, reached down with Smith to seize Jake and with the girl shoving him up they hauled him inboard. Buckley sat him in the sternsheets and the girl climbed in over the side to sit beside him. Jake looked at her sidewise, remembering that startling revelation of her body pressed against him. She did not seem to be aware of that and only promised, "I'll look at your arm when we have light." But, shyly, she did not look at him now.

Buckley, relieved that Smith had returned unhurt, bent to the oars again and sent the boat flying downriver with the current. If the SS *Sotheby* was on time then she would be waiting at the mouth of the river. Smith slumped in the sternsheets alongside Véronique and Jake. He was soaking wet but the night was warm and so was the body of the girl next to him. He was weary to the bone and leaned against her, his eyes closing as he watched Buckley bend forward and back in a steady rhythm. He remembered the big leading hand's concern when Smith had been dragged into the boat, and grinned at the memory, even laughed softly. So that Buckley and the girl looked at him, startled.

But Smith's eyes were closed now. As he drifted into sleep he thought that he was pretty sure he had laid the *Mary Ellen* where he wanted her.

17

"No medals for the *Mary Ellen*!"

Gustav Moehle, captain of *Brandenburg*, sent a boat and a good man with the lead to sound the entrance to the pool where the lighter had sunk He also sent another boat with a diver aboard to go down and examine the obstruction and report. That took time, and at the end the word from the diver only confirmed the findings obtained by the laborious process of sounding with the lead the entrance to the pool was blocked, the *Mary Ellen* laid across it. Where there had been twenty-five feet of water there was now only fifteen between the wreck of the lighter and the surface

Brandenburg drew nineteen feet.

Kurt Larsen, at the back of the bridge, saw his captain take the news calmly Truth to tell, Moehle had expected it. He had guessed that the lighter had not been making an attack but intended to lock him in, had hoped the attempt had failed But he had witnessed the way that attempt had been steadily pressed home in the face of a terrible fire, seen the long, low craft handled as if no gun was laid on her at all. And then she was sunk between the two marker buoys as if they had been put there for her benefit.

Paul Brunner, the Executive Officer, suggested doubtfully, "We could try to drive through She'll be built of pretty thin steel plate."

"But a lot of it And she was loaded with cargo, low in the water." Moehle shook his head Cargo or no, if he tried to force his way through the lighter and out into the river then he would damage *Brandenburg*'s bottom. Now he was not thinking of making her fit to fight but of her survival. He had made good the damage to her bow but he would not repair a hole ripped in her bottom without recourse to a dockyard. He gave his orders: "Tell the divers to blast a way for us."

But that, too, took time. The divers finally surfaced, after numerous dives and several muffled explosions, to report that the way was clear. Moehle took his ship out of the pool and hurrying downstream but by then it was three in the morning.

Kurt Larsen still hoped they might be in time to aid *Graf Spee*. Her sailing could be delayed And he told himself that the luck was turning their way when *Brandenburg* ran past the port at the mouth of the river It was broad day but she passed unseen by anyone on the shore because of the thick fog lying over the estuary. She had come and gone in secret. The world would never know she had been there.

But she had been seen. The boat from the *Mary Ellen* had rowed slowly across the estuary from first light. That was at Smith's order. Despite his weariness he had dozed only fitfully, starting awake every now and again to peer around him and demand, "Where are we now?" He had woken finally with the dawn when Buckley told him they had reached the mouth of the river. Smith had rubbed at his face and said grimly, "We'll patrol and see her out. Then we'll look for the *Sotheby*."

No one rebelled. Jake and the girl, Garrity and Buckley, they had all been looking forward to going aboard the merchantman, certain of coffee and breakfast, a bunk and sleep. But they accepted Smith's ruling without complaint because he was still the captain, Buckley without surprise because he knew Smith. Garrity relinquished the oars that he had pulled for the past hour and Buckley took them up again. It was not to be their last exchange.

Smith had been afraid *Brandenburg* would be close behind them but she was not. He feared, as the light grew about them, the minutes ticked into hours and on into the morning, that she would elude him in the mist.

She almost did. But then Jake, hollow-eyed and bristly-jawed, said huskily, "What's that over there?"

Buckley paused in his rowing and they all peered along the line of the pointing finger. Jake saw her and they all saw her, as he had seen her that first night, as a furred silhouette glimpsed through the mist. The high steel cliff of her side, her towering superstructure and the turrets with the long,

menacing barrels of the guns – all seen like a ghost ship. The rumble of her engines came to them as a deep note reaching out over the river. Then she drove deeper into the mist and was gone.

They stared after her, open-mouthed except for Smith, who sank back in his seat and said, "All right, now we'll look for the *Sotheby*." He saw Buckley shaking his head over his captain but Smith was content at last. He had done his duty, all man could, and *Brandenburg* would be too late to help *Graf Spee*. Now he would truly rest.

In the evening of that day Hannah Fitzsimmons and Sarah stood on the deck of a tug steaming out of Montevideo. Their places had been bought expensively by Hannah but she had dismissed the cost drily: "I'll put it down to expenses, honey." Sarah had laughed. Both still anxiously awaited news of Smith, never mentioned him except when they made their daily visit to the shipping office. Sarah had set the example there and Hannah had admired her courage and copied her silence.

The two women had grown together since their first meeting in Warsaw months before. The elegant Hannah had not changed but Sarah had let her hair grow so now it swung on her shoulders. They worked together, laughed and argued, had one thing in common. Hannah glanced at Sarah now and prayed for good news of Smith – for both of them.

The tug had just cleared the harbour, where every inch of space was crowded with silent watchers, 200,000 people come to see history made. *Graf Spee* had sailed earlier and was a mile ahead of the tug. There had been mist at first but they could see her clearly now. There was tension among those aboard the tug, whether they were crew or correspondents. They believed they were to witness a naval battle at first hand because *Graf Spee* was headed out to sea and the three British cruisers waited there. They showed as specks on the horizon, closing in for the kill - or to be killed. An aircraft from one of them circled slowly above the pocket battleship. The range between her and the cruisers was steadily closing and she was outside the three-mile limit recognised by the Royal Navy as Uruguayan waters.

Sarah thought that the deception she and Hannah had practised or attempted might have deferred the bloodshed for a time but now it was sure to come. Soon . . .

But then Hannah put her binoculars to her eyes. After a moment she said, puzzled, "I think she's stopped."

She handed the glasses to Sarah, who stared out to sea and then slowly agreed, "She looks to be stopped. And there are boats leaving her now."

They passed the glasses from one to the other as the minutes ticked by, the tug plugged out to sea and the sun slid down the sky. It was setting when Sarah said, "There's a flash, like lightning! And smoke!" Hannah saw both against the red of the setting sun, the long tongue of flame and then the column of dirty smoke boiling high above the superstructure of *Graf Spee*. Sarah lowered the binoculars and then they both heard the deep rumble of the explosion.

Sarah whispered, "She's blown herself up!"

And Hannah, who had seen enough of killing, said softly, "Thank God!"

Sunset turned into dusk, then night and *Graf Spee* settled but sank no further, her bottom lodged on a bank. She blazed from end to end now.

Robert Hurst and Donovan were at their action stations as *Ajax* closed the coast of Uruguay. Their turret had been a casualty of the earlier action and so they were now again part of a damage control party aft of the bridge. They knew something of that now and were silent. They had survived once and you shouldn't push your luck.

They watched as *Ajax* launched her aircraft, the little Seafox catapulted from the waist to climb and turn away to head towards the coast. Some time after that a messenger came scurrying down from the bridge on an errand and Donovan called to him, "Hey! What's goin' on?"

The messenger might have been eighteen years old but looked younger. He gave them a quick, nervous grin and hurried on about his business, but he called over his shoulder, "She's coming out!"

Donovan and Hurst exchanged glances and the big man said quietly, "Jesus Christ."

Robert Hurst echoed, "Amen."

It was dusk now and the sun was setting over the sea towards Argentina. The American radio commentators had described Harwood's ships as 'The suicide squadron with their pop-guns'. The three cruisers held on their course to meet *Graf Spee* and the men aboard them waited for that meeting.

Then a man came running along the deck and shouted as he passed, "Lewin, up in the air – ", he was talking of the pilot of the Seafox, " - he says she's blown herself up!"

They did not believe it, of course, though they wanted to. It was too good to be true. But the message passed again and again, then the cheering started and at last they knew that they were going to live. So when *Achilles* hauled up alongside *Ajax* and the crews of both ships cheered like maniacs, Donovan and Robert Hurst were among the leaders.

The ships steamed in to see the last of their enemy. It was night now, full dark, and the grounded hulk was ablaze from stem to stern, a massive funeral pyre of a great ship with flames towering to top her masts. She had evaded a hundred hunting warships of two navies, British and French, and almost pounded *Exeter* to destruction. Now she was being destroyed before their eyes.

The three cruisers turned away and steamed out to sea to take up station again off the estuary of the River Plate.

Gustav Moehle, like Harwood but unknowingly, had Mike Fowler's broadcasts coming through on his bridge as his ship headed for the waters off Montevideo at her full speed of thirty knots. Kurt Larsen had gone to the bridge for some routine reason and then dallied, listening. So he heard the American's drawled account of the scuttling and destruction of *Graf Spee*.

Kurt choked and could not speak. Every man aboard *Brandenburg* had tried so hard to join their consort off the Plate but they had failed. Kurt could see now in his mind's eye the thin face of the man who had beaten them, his cold stare and quick, warm smile. A man who could lead and would be followed. Kurt had met him in Spain and Berlin, wondered if he had seen the last of him now.

He heard Moehle order the change of course that would take him and his crew back to Germany. The radio was switched off and now there was silence on the bridge. Moehle broke it with just one sentence, voice deep with emotion, "This is a sad day for Langsdorff, a fine captain and a good man." Then the silence closed in again.

When Smith stepped aboard *Sotheby* that morning he asked for a signal to be sent off in plain language, that *Brandenburg* had been sighted off the mouth of the river. *Sotheby*'s captain looked at him oddly but the signal was sent and acknowledged by a destroyer. Smith had little hope that the cruiser would be found in the huge empty tracts of the wide Atlantic, but sending that signal was also part of his duty.

He and his little band spoke no word of *Brandenburg*'s seeking sanctuary in the river. He told *Sotheby*'s captain that he, Buckley and Véronique were survivors from the *Whitby*. Jake and Garrity said they were getting out because of anti-British and anti-American activities in the port. Jake muttered to Garrity, "And that'll be true enough when that bastard Otto Bergmann gets back downriver. He'll be looking for us to shoot us!"

That evening they sat around the table in the saloon with the ship's officers and listened to Mike Fowler's broadcast account of the scuttling of *Graf Spee*. Smith sat in silence while the rest cheered and pounded the table. He wondered about Robert Hurst, in *Ajax*.

Afterwards, when they were alone, Jake said, "You'll win a decoration for this, that's for sure."

But Smith shook his head. "There'll be no medals."

Jake gaped at him for a moment then protested, outraged, "But you stopped *Brandenburg* from going to the Plate! What about that night you tried to blow the hole in her bow a lot bigger? And when the *Mary Ellen* sank under us? That was above and beyond the call of duty! That was a real shooting war up there in the pool!"

Smith ran a hand through his fair hair and grinned at Jake, of an age with his own son in *Ajax*, "Exactly. There'll be no medals for the *Mary Ellen*, for us or for Moehle and his crew because that river is in the country of a neutral and we

fought a war in somebody else's backyard. We were all violating neutrality. So Mochle's superiors will lock up his report as Admiralty will lock up mine and the keys will be thrown away."

Jake flapped a hand in disbelief. "But somebody will talk!"

"Who?"

"All right, so *Brandenburg*'s crew are sworn to silence. What about me, huh? What if I decided to blow it all over the networks in the States?"

"I'd say you were lying." And Jake saw that Smith meant what he said. Smith went on, "And when I said we'd all fought a war in flagrant breach of neutrality, I included you. How do you think your Department of State would react if you claimed to have been one of the belligerents?" Smith watched Jake's scepticism change to bewilderment then reluctant acceptance. Smith finished, "So it never happened, Jake."

Sotheby took them north and when she berthed in Port of Spain, Trinidad, all of them disembarked save Jake. He was staying aboard until the ship reached Galveston, returning to the United States to see to the melancholy business of winding up his parents' estate. The others would all take another ship back to Montevideo, the original destination of three of them but Garrity was also going to make his peace with the Royal Navy through the Attaché there. Smith had promised to speak in his defence, and to obtain full compensation for his loss of the *Mary Ellen*, though that would have to be unofficial.

They bade farewell to Jake on the quayside as their taxi waited with the engine running. He shook hands with all of them and had a lot he wanted to say but was tongue-tied when he looked at Véronique. Smith joked, "You can go back to being a neutral now."

But Jake was a serious young man that day. He said, "I've a feeling the States can't stay out of the war for ever, but I might get in on my own."

Then they left him standing at the foot of the gangway and walked along to where the taxi waited at the end of the quay. He willed the girl to turn and look back – as she wished that

he would call her to stay. But the moment passed too quickly, they piled into the cab and it drove away, leaving him alone But they were both determined to meet again.

Smith and the others finally arrived in Montevideo on 3 January 1940. They had changed from one ship to another at the last minute because the second promised a quicker passage Because of the hurried transfer Smith was unable to inform the office of the Naval Attaché so arrived a day early and unexpected but in time. As his ship berthed in the harbour he saw that *Ajax* was already there and considerable traffic passed between her and the shore, launches and pinnaces crowded with sailors Expensive cables had already assured Smith that Robert Hurst had not been among the casualties. He would be aboard *Ajax* now.

Smith went ashore with the other three within the hour and they took rooms in a hotel on the waterfront Then he went out to stand on the top of the steps at the entrance, Buckley at his side, both of them looking over the heads of the people crowding the street. They were packed shoulder to shoulder on the broad pavements, there to applaud the ship's company of *Ajax*. Montevideo was neutral but these young men were heroes.

They were paraded around the city in open-topped buses and cars, cheered every inch of the way. Smith, standing at the head of the steps, watched them pass. He was in uniform because he was going to report to the office of the Naval Attaché.

Hannah Fitzsimmons and Sarah had been returning to the hotel but were overtaken by the procession when still some fifty yards away. They perched precariously on top of a table outside a bar, the better to see. Until Hannah chanced to glance aside then blinked, stared, and told Sarah, "There's your father." She had to shout to make herself heard above the cheering.

Sarah was cheering and waving at the young sailors. They waved back at the flushed and laughing girl with the blonde mane. Then Hannah's words got through to her and her laughter faded, she turned to stare first at the woman and then beyond her as Hannah indicated the direction with a jerk of her head. For some seconds the girl stood still, then

she jumped down from the table and ran.

Smith did not see her slim figure weaving through the edge of the crowd towards him, nor Hannah standing wistful now in the background. There was one open-topped car in the cavalcade that was slowly passing the hotel now. It was crammed with young sailors, all but one of them grinning widely. That one stared back at him, hostile, and Smith saw his own mirror-image.

He had expected the hostility, and that it would take time for this young man to accept him. He was prepared to wait.

He was briefly blind to the reality of this war that would not wait for them, nor the other orphans of the storm that had now broken.

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